Pilot Overview

This presentation will offer an overview of a pilot project initiated in a first-year writing program this fall. Reflecting a "translingual" understanding of multilingualism—an understanding that is still evolving—the pilot places students deemed "ELL" into classes with students who are considered mainstream. The presentation will describe the general programmatic framework within which the pilot was enacted, the pilot's curriculum and the assumptions that underlie it, and some of what we have learned from a semester's implementation.

Grounded in what Paul Kei Matsuda calls a "containment" model, the institution at which we initiated the pilot has classified and placed international and multilingual students using a timed writing assessment for nearly two decades. The assessment primarily evaluates language proficiency, relying on monolingual notions of fluency and language thresholds. Students who are identified as "international" (which, like "ELL," is an institutionally generated term that our pilot has brought under critique) write essays in response to a prompt and are then placed based on perceived proficiency with writing in Standard American English. Students who are deemed somewhat deficient are placed into designated sections of ENGL 1101. Students who are deemed even more deficient are tracked into a combination of a designated section of ENGL 1101 and ENGL 1100, a course designed to lend additional support. The pedagogy in these courses mirrors the pedagogy of the mainstream courses.

At the time that we began to discuss new ways of seeing and doing writing education with students classified as ELL, we were initiating a broader curricular change in the writing program. This is an important aspect of how we have come to see our work. For years, the program's curriculum had a very formalistic orientation, and its way of perceiving and treating students with diverse backgrounds in language extended from that view. The longstanding ELL program in first-year writing carried assumptions that can be largely located in the "monolingual and traditionally multilingual" category described by Bruce Horner, Samantha NeCamp and Christiane Donahue in their explanation of a translingual notion of multilingualism. To state it another way, the ELL program remained aligned with the formalistic philosophy away from which the program was evolving. This formalistic view assumes:

- That the boundaries between languages are largely stable. When people communicate, they communicate in one distinct language or another. And within each language singular notions of correctness constitute the target of pedagogy.
- That the boundaries between cultures are also largely stable, and there is a one-to-one correspondence between languages and cultures.
- That fluency within English is a fixed measurable and appropriate target.
- That first-year composition is English only, and that elements from languages other than English—while maybe not forbidden in informal, primarily oral, interactions—should be seen as "interference" in academic writing.
- That non-standard dialects within English, as well as hybridized or World Englishes have no legitimacy.

Likewise, much of the administrative apparatus that shaped and defined the writing program, from placement testing and course outcomes to professional development and program assessments, also extended from a formalistic view of writing. As the program moved toward a more social view of writing, and as it began to change its administrative structures and processes, it was natural to also begin to rethink and redesign the "ELL" program.

Our reviews of emerging research in linguistics and language acquisition, as well as research in rhetoric and composition, helped us to clarify and deepen our questions. We knew that, given our more general curricular changes, the foundational beliefs driving our pedagogical model for a new curriculum were philosophically out of pace with what we were doing with ELL classes.

In contrast with a formalistic view, the social view toward which we were moving is driven by the assumptions that:

- Many primary literacy skills are often learned outside of schools. And they are learned there because they exist and are important.
- That linguistic norms are continually emergent in different contexts, and people should learn to be agile with language in professionally and culturally diverse communities. This rather than aiming to learn a more fixed and stable target language and then expecting it to be universally applicable.
- Literacy is about making meaning in specific contexts. Meaning is not delivered unilaterally by words. It is co-constructed, or negotiated between authors and audiences, and this negotiation is reliant upon, and complicated by, cultural commonalities and differences.
- Literacy is not universal code: it manifests differently in specific practices, particular ways of behaving with language in specific contexts. We can't defer to a single, stable authority for correctness.
- That language diversity is an important value to actively promote in writing classes.

A translingual understanding of multilingualism is more philosophically aligned with the social view that informed the new curriculum. It conceptualizes English as constantly in flux and redefined in use, and it is mindful of English as an aspect of globalization.

Practices at our institution had proceeded from the assumption that SAE is the same as *Lingua Franca English* as it manifests globally. Research, however, shows that as English use spreads, it also becomes more hybridized and diverse (see, for instance, Meirkord, 2004; Planken, 2005; Sampson and Zhao, 2003; Seidlhoffer, 2004). Suresh Canagarajah (2007) writes that rather than being a stable standard, *Lingua Franca English* is "constantly brought into being in each context of communication" and users "cannot depend on a pre-constituted form for meaning" (926). The increasing use of English as a global *Lingua Franca* points to the need for more flexibility and sophisticated adaptability *among all English users*, rather than for the segregation and remediation of those deemed ELL based on their perceived lack of proficiency with SAE

(Firth and Wagner, 1997; Horner, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Matsuda, 2010; Trimbur, 2010; Zuengler and Miller, 2006).

Likewise, geographic areas and segments of language practice are often now characterized by "linguistic contact zones" involving multiple languages and/or forms of English, rather than being dominated by a singular form (see, for instance, Firth and Wagner, 1997; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Current practices typically segregate all of those deemed ELL into the same courses, regardless of their varied histories with English, the forms of English with which they may be familiar or adept, their national origins and cultural orientations, or the varied experiences they have with schooling and literacy education.

Last fall, we administered a questionnaire to sixty-one students enrolled in sections of our pilot project this fall. Most of the students in these classes who speak a language other than English speak a form of Spanish, Chinese, French or Arabic.

The portrait is more complicated than that though. Our research, which includes interviews, observations and analysis of students' work, shows that our students have a wide variety of backgrounds, speak multiple dialects and languages, and engage in daily activities that require a wide range of linguistic competencies—including shuttling between different languages throughout the day. When asked whether they use forms of English other than Standard American English when outside of class, the students identified Spanglish, Chinglish, Arabish, Appalachian English, Southern English and African American English among their dialects.

When asked about the contexts in which they use various languages, the following were among the responses:

- i use English in school, english and spanish to speak to friends and family. usually when around my family its a mixture; spanglish.
- I use English at university or to speak with anybody who don't know Arabic and I use Arabic to speak with my friends.
- Actually, I speak arabic with my friends and family. I also speak informal Engish in social websites such as : facbook and twitter. Also, I speak and write formal English in academic classes.
- I use English at school, and speak with my friends from other countries. I use Chinese when I talk to my parents, and hanging out with my Chinese friends.
- I use kirundi at home and french at school since kindergarten
- I use English at home, school, and work . . . My father's family is hispanic therefore some members of our family prefer to speak Spanish, however I do not consider myself fluent in it.

Our own inquiry is consistent with research that challenges not only the construct of a stable, standard English, but also that of the homogenized English language learner and user. It reinforced our desire to move toward a writing pedagogy that emphasizes social interaction, cultural inquiry and reflexivity, and awareness of linguistic diversity .

In place of a curriculum that was centered on mastery of a target language, we wanted to develop a curriculum that was attentive to performance strategies, situational complexity and social negotiation.

Three primary assumptions inform the curriculum:

- That students classified as ELL within the older system may not be as proficient with writing in SAE as our mainstream student population, but as a group they may have advanced proficiencies in other areas that characterize sophistication with language writing: such as the ability to adapt to different cultural and linguistic contexts, including contexts that favor different forms of English.
- That both students classified as ELL and students who are classified as mainstream will benefit from a writing curriculum that positions them as equal co-inquirers into language and literacy.
- That a curriculum that focuses on literacy and language itself is an effective way to foster greater proficiency with writing in English in multiple contexts, including those in which SAE is the preferred form.

The curriculum in our pilot classes has students writing about literacy and language in process-driven courses as they: inquire into their own literate histories and those of their classmates; explore various topics related to the study of literacy and language in global contexts; and conduct primary research into the diverse language practices that surround them—with a special emphasis on linguistic diversity.

Pilot Course Details

All four instructors participating in the pilot met bi-monthly before and during the semester to discuss scholarship in language acquisition and development, language politics in U.S. higher education, monolingual paradigms of writing education (and their limitations in multilingual settings), and translingualism. These discussions led to conversations about assignments, and the instructors chose to work off of three main possibilities: a literacy memoir, an ethnography focused on language use within particular communities of practice, and critical responses to the CCCC "Students' Right to Their Own Language."

Though each instructor was to adapt these primary assignments to reflect her own interpretation of translingualism, the group decided that most course readings should be about language and literacy, and should be written in a variety of Englishes and genres. These readings were intended to maximize student contact with linguistic hybridity and to create multiple spaces for talking about language difference, the fluidity of language, culture, and genres, code switching, code meshing, and what it meant to be an effective writer in a globalizing world. In addition to readings and composing within and across several genres and Englishes, students were to peer-workshop in linguistically mixed groups and reflect on their changing approaches to varieties of English during the course of the semester.

The literacy memoir invited writers to explore their histories as readers and writers and draw connections between their personal histories and larger socio-cultural narratives of literacy and development. Drawing on Gee's argument that all writing is cultural work, and Scribner and Brandt's arguments on literacy development as social phenomena, the assignment encouraged writers to situate their own literacies within a complex web of international and national educational policies, globalizing trade routes and their impact on individual and social literacies. Class conversations and activities during the assignment unit were based off of readings of Scribner's "Literacy in Three Metaphors," Brandt's "Sponsors of Literacy" and a variety of literacy memoirs such as Paul Marshall's "Poets in the Kitchen," Sherman's Alexie's "The Joys of Reading: Superman and Me," Luc Sante's "Dummy" and excerpts from Eva Hoffman's "Lost in Translation."

The second assignment, "Languages, Texts, and Communities," was developed to help writers focus on the dynamic nature of language use in a globalizing society. Drawing on Lave and Wenger's conceptualization of communities of practice, students were invited to choose a *distinct* place or community and immerse themselves in the language and literacy practices prevalent within their chosen sites of inquiry. As part of their ethnographic inquiry, writers built an archive to curate and document at least five artifacts that represented the various idioms, dialects, languages, and/or literacies frequently used within these spaces/communities. Later, each writer composed a cultural analysis of their archive to discuss the various kinds of language mixing that may or may not be taking place and how the presence (or absence) of acts of linguistic or discursive plurality were indicative of larger shifts in culture. In the reflective component of this assignment, writers reflected on how they composed their analyses and the various choices they made to accurately represent the discursive complexities of their site of inquiry.

Two instructors developed an alternative to the "Languages, Texts, and Borders" assignment. In these two pilot sections, students engaged with the CCCC position statement "Students' Right to their Own Language" by positioning themselves within their own literacy histories and crafting their personal statements as informed responses to the SRTOL statement. In this assignment, writers were encouraged to develop "a complicated view of literacy" and "contribute to [classroom] conversations" about language varieties and their relationship to "learning, employability, civil rights, social status, and linguistic profiling."

In our presentation, we hope to share some of the findings from our ongoing research on the project.