

Chapter 7

Multilingual Writing Support: Fostering Critical Consciousness Through One-to-One Writing Conferencing

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will provide a research-based protocol for one-to-one writing conferencing that helps tutors and teachers to navigate the tension between standardizing multilingual students' language practices and honoring their rhetorically rich linguistic backgrounds through a series of activities in a ten-week writing center pedagogy course. This series of activities was specifically developed in an effort to respond to writing tutors who are always seeking strategies that effectively apply theoretical principles in practice. While this work focuses specifically on one-to-one writing tutoring, the topic of multilingual writing support is applicable to any English language learning context. By the end of this chapter, readers will have gained a practical strategy centered on using declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge to help preservice tutors and teachers develop metalinguistic awareness and foster critical consciousness through one-to-one conferencing.

INTRODUCTION

There exists a critical tension for writing teachers and tutors committed to social justice—empowering multilingual writers to recognize and apply their unique rhetorical fluencies while being mindful of institutional expectations for conformity to standard language practices. A cursory review of TESOL and writing center journal publications over the past decade points to the commitment and challenges within the two fields to deliver equitable and inclusive teaching and tutoring pedagogies that resist the myth that academic literacy is the only foundation for success (Graff, 1991, 2017; Grimm, 1996, 1999) and embrace the ways in which language variety is a personal and professional resource. Indeed, writing centers (and the tutors who work within them) play a particularly important role in helping writers both to reproduce and resist English language norms. This chapter thus considers writing centers as a rich site

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8093-6.ch007

for examining the theory and practice of multilingual writing support, specifically for those who teach or tutor English as an additional language. Focusing on the non-traditional TESOL context of the writing center provides a distinct analysis of critical praxis in the teaching and advocacy of multilingual students.

Language and literacy have long been means by which dominant groups categorize and classify the Other. In the educational context, multilingual students are othered because they differ in their use of the English language and are thereby impacted by policies and practices designed to remediate a perceived inability to meet a singular English language standard (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Colyar & Stich, 2011; Flores & Drake, 2014; Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; Matsuda, 2006). This singular standard is established by White supremacist, heteronormative, ableist, middle class masculine systems (Inoue, 2016), and since standardized language is fixed, there is no room for difference. According to Milroy and Milroy (2012), English language standardization is an ongoing process driven “by various social, political and commercial needs” that intends to “ensure fixed values for the counters in a system” (p. 19). This codification of standardized English is a social construct established through correctness (Lippi-Green, 1994; Milroy & Milroy, 2012). Correct usage of language is an in-group marker, according to Labov (1966), and the in-group in the case of standardized English is the White, educated middle class (Baker-Bell, 2019; Lippi-Green, 2012; Smitherman, 2000). Within the ideology of standardized English, certain linguistic features assume greater value than others, and non-standard practices are “considered careless and ignorant deviations” (Milroy & Milroy, p. 21). As Milroy and Milroy explain, “Language guardians always consider non-standard usage (and sometimes standard colloquialisms) to arise from the perversity of speakers or from cognitive deficiency (an inability to learn what is ‘correct’)” (p. 21). Hegemony is maintained by these language guardians, who infiltrate lived environments. Lippi-Green (1994) suggests that, primarily, the educational system promotes and protects standard language ideologies, with media, the entertainment industry, and corporate America equally complicit in the indoctrination process. The recent film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) illustrates the saturation of standardization among these settings in which an African American telemarketer is instructed to use his White voice and stick to the script if he wants to be successful. This narrative of the minoritized Other who is expected to betray his identity in the service of capital elides the strength of linguistic diversity in U.S. classrooms and boardrooms. It also exemplifies the critical tension for writing teachers and tutors who are committed to justice in serving multilingual students while working within a system that positions them as language guardians in the interest of power and privilege.

Among multilingual students, there are 5 million English learners (EL) enrolled in the U.S. K-12 public school system (Irwin et al., 2021), and according to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.), only 67% of ELs graduate from high school compared to the 85% of native English-speaking peers who do so. While ELs comprise one subgroup of multilingual students, a variety of factors contribute to the opportunity gaps and linguistic prejudices that all multilingual students face on their academic journeys. Because of the stringent norms and conventions of standardized English, effective communication remains a barrier for college, professional, and civic success, specifically for those from minoritized populations (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Colyar & Stich, 2011; Flores & Drake, 2014). Studies reveal that U.S. institutions deem students who come from minoritized domestic (primarily Black and Latinx) and international backgrounds not academically prepared to succeed in written communication (Howell, 2011; Smith Jaggars & West Stacey, 2014; Tierney & Duncheon, 2016; Tierney & Sablan, 2014). While one cannot assume that the language proficiency of all minoritized domestic and international multilingual students is below that of native English-speaking students, within the writing classroom context linguistic biases have resulted in relegating domestic and international multilingual students

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