

## Re-Framing Race in Teaching Writing Across the Curriculum

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**Abstract:** Although faculty across the curriculum are often faced with issues of racial identity in the teaching of writing, WAC has offered little support for addressing race in assignment design, classroom interactions, and assessment. Through examples from teaching workshops, I offer specific ways that we can engage discussions about teaching writing and race productively.

A graduate Health Policy class is discussing *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot. The book traces the life of Henrietta Lacks, a cancer patient, a poor African American woman, a mother, a wife, and likely the world's most important cell donor. Lacks' cells were taken without her consent and were used to create an "immortal" cell line, which has led to major advances in biomedical research and huge profits. Lacks died shortly after her cells were taken in 1951, although her cells are still used today in labs around the world.

In discussing the ethics of using a patient's cells, a white student argues that taking the cells of an African American cancer patient and using the cells without her consent was acceptable "because it was legal at that time." An African American student bristles and questions, "just like slavery?" Two Indian students in the class are puzzled at this exchange. The remaining students in the class are silent.

Last spring, John, a white faculty member in Health Policy and Administration, shared this story with me during one of our discussions about teaching writing. John was disturbed by the interaction among the students in his class; not only had the white student missed an important point about bioethics but she had also missed seeing how bioethical issues could be related to race and socioeconomic status. The retort from the African American student did not further the conversation, and John could not get any of the students to meaningfully discuss issues related to patient consent, ownership of genetic material, and the implications of these issues for different groups after this class exchange. Although John was frustrated by this event, he also saw it as an important window into student learning and thought this incident would make an ideal writing opportunity. So, he contacted me to help him design a meaningful writing assignment around this class exchange in hopes that it might help students understand the ways that a professional in the discipline might think through these issues. The bioethical issues presented in *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* are complex, and John wanted his students to think more critically about those issues, especially as they relate to poverty and race, before writing their final papers for the semester.

In my time as a writing across the curriculum (WAC) director, I have worked with many faculty like John who have an interest in using writing to help students think through technical issues of identity, ethics, and policy. In John's case, the topic of race could have served as a roadblock to writing instruction; he could

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have dropped the class discussion and moved on. Instead, he saw the exchange as an opportunity for writing and reflection.

Stories like John's have led me to believe that we need to anticipate these moments where race and writing come together across the curriculum and share ways of working through these moments as we work with faculty and teaching assistants in helping them design, deliver, and assess writing.<sup>[1]</sup> The WAC literature, however, offers little help in understanding these intersections. While the WAC literature provides a stunning number of resources on developing faculty workshops, tracking changes in student writing over time, and managing successful programs (Young & Fulwiler, 1986; McLeod, Miraglia, Soven, & Thaiss, 2001; Soliday 2011), it is decidedly less helpful in attending to issues of students' racial identities. In "Black holes: Writing across the curriculum, assessment, and the gravitational invisibility of race," Chris Anson (2012) explains that the dearth of information on racial identity is "puzzling," given WAC's openness to diverse forms of discourse and the populations who produce those forms (p. 16). Anson provides an extensive search of the WAC literature, including the WAC Clearinghouse, CompPile, collections, and annotated WAC bibliographies, to find information related to WAC and race. His search yields only a handful of references. For example, the WAC Clearinghouse does include a bibliography related to "diversity," but most of the entries are related to gender, not racial identity. Anson notes that WAC leaders are not disinterested in issues related to race but that "the subject of race is perceived to generate layers of additional complexity over principles, theories, and pedagogies already challenging to faculty in various disciplines to interpret and apply to their teaching" (2012, p. 19). Likewise, WAC scholars may worry about being perceived as foregrounding the values of composition studies over those of other disciplines. Besides, when WAC principles are distilled to brief faculty workshops with a focus on best practices in generic assignment design and assessment, issues of diversity seem "beside the point" (Anson, 2012, p. 19).

More recently, a number of WAC articles have been devoted to multilingual writers (Johns, 2005; Cox & Zawacki, 2011), but often these articles ignore students' racial identities in favor of their linguistic identities. Our field's interest in literacy practices makes a focus on linguistic identity understandable, but as scholars in English Language Learning have noted, "Through teaching and learning a second language, racialized images of the teacher, students, and people that appear in teaching materials get produced and reproduced" (Kubota & Lin, 2009 p. 1). Indeed, ESL/EFL researchers have begun to acknowledge that a critical perspective on multilingual writers also means paying attention to issues of power and racial identity (For example, see the special issue of *TESOL Quarterly*, Kubota & Lin, 2006, dedicated to the topic.) Ryuko Kubota and Angel Lin (2009) identify four areas for study, including learner/teacher identities and race; manifestations of race in pedagogy, curriculum, materials, and technology; language policy, language ideology, and race; and critical (classroom) discourse analysis and race (p. 15-16). Each of these reminds us that language teaching is not merely about the dissemination of technical skills but about the interactions that inform those instructional contexts both in the classroom and in the ideologies that pervade those contexts.

To take a racialized perspective on WAC suggests a critical stance toward the field. Scholars such as Donna LeCourt (1996), Victor Villanueva (2001), and Michelle Hall Kells (2007) have called for critical perspectives on WAC practices, especially as related to ethno-linguistic identity. LeCourt, for example, has called for changes that allow students to bring in their alternative literacies. The Writing Across Communities initiative at the University of New Mexico is attempting to do just that by integrating WAC and service-learning through an eco-composition agenda that is meaningful to students from the local community. Kells (2007) writes of the program:

The challenge for the Writing Across Communities initiative at UNM is enhancing opportunities to build identification with the cultures of the academy as well as to cultivate appreciation across the university for the cultures and epistemologies our students bring with them. (p. 96)

WAC's limited engagement with race stands in contrast to the rich body of literature in composition studies on ethnic rhetorics and literacies. One gesture to bring race to WAC scholarship is to draw on this body of research. However, because WAC operates throughout the university community, it is also important to consider that simply importing theory into our practices will likely fail. We have to engage the other frames about race that circulate in the university community—frames that are often deployed by administrators and other powerful stakeholders in the university community.

My goal in this article is to offer specific ways that we can integrate discussions about race in our interactions with faculty, graduate students, and administrators across the curriculum. First, I explain several other frames about race that operate in the university. I then go on to explain three ways that we can reframe race within WAC to make race a meaningful part of our discussions about teaching writing across the curriculum. In my discussion, I use examples from faculty workshops and writing intensive courses to illustrate these points. By understanding the new diversity, recognizing how stereotypes matter, and drawing on linguistic diversity, I contend that we will better help faculty teach writing and improve their ways of responding to student writing.

## Existing Frames

In *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories About Writing and Writers* (2008), Linda Adler-Kassner explains how framing—"the idea that stories are always set within and reinforce particular boundaries" (p. 4)—allows for the creation of larger narratives and help individuals make sense of everyday experiences (p. 11). Quoting Deacon, Adler-Kassner goes on to write that "frames define stories that both reflect and perpetuate dominant cultural values and interest rather than 'stimulating the development of alternative conceptions and values' that are 'critical' to those values and interests" (p. 12).

Drawing on the notion of frames allows us to interrogate the stories we already have available to discuss race and writing as well as related notions about achievement and language use. Ironically, often the most powerful, visible frame for race on university campuses are not those deployed by faculty researchers but frames deployed by university administration. For instance, a common frame for discussing race comes is the *multicultural* frame. A multicultural frame about race might go as follows:

The challenges in working with an ever-growing pluralistic school population encompass many areas. The provision of relevant multicultural curriculums, the use of culturally sensitive assessment and intervention strategies, the training of school staff in the provision of these services, the recruitment and retention of multicultural and diverse professionals, and the integration of diverse communities and parents in an authentic and empowering manner are only a few of the critical issues facing those working with today's students. (Sanchez et al., 1995, para. 3)

In the multicultural frame, the term race is often synonymous with diversity or a number of other ways that we might characterize individuals in a pluralistic society (gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.), thus race is just one of many variables through which we may recognize difference. The stories in this frame emphasize "cultural sensitivity" or awareness, suggesting that increased understanding of our differences will lead to a more tolerant society.<sup>[2]</sup> As a result, multicultural approaches tend to focus on training and community building. Even very good initiatives, such as anti-racism initiatives, however, don't engage with student literacies (St. Cloud State University, 2012; University of Puget Sound, 2012).

Although the multicultural frame has been a powerful way to open up discussions of difference, it is not free from problems. The approach conjures notions of attending "diversity workshops" that include "warm and fuzzy conversations about diversity that raise consciousness but rarely upset or threaten" (Denny, 2010, p. 33). As Jennifer Trainor notes (2008), attempts in multicultural education to interrogate white privilege

have fallen short with white audiences (p. 7) and can actually have the effect of fortifying existing identities and refocusing only on the struggles of working class whites (p. 19).

Another common frame in discussions about race is the *achievement gap* frame. An achievement gap frame might sound like the following:

Black ghetto students will get statistically significant higher scores on measures of abstract thinking when they have mastered the grammar of standard English...the mean IQ scores of black ghetto students will go up when they learn to speak and write standard English. (Farrell, 1983, p. 479, 481)

In the achievement gap frame, race is an identifying marker for grouping individuals who share a set of physical characteristics. For example, in the quote above, black individuals who live in poor, urban areas share a common set of attributes. By changing the linguistic practices of this group, the story goes, there will be a change in their cognitive abilities. Achievement gap frames, such as the example above, employ a comparative approach to race; for example, race is tied to a trait, such as IQ, that can be contrasted to the IQ of another raced group.

The achievement gap frame can be found in high-profile books such as the *Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996) and, more recently, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Arum & Roska, 2011). To be fair, arguments such as the one in the *Bell Curve* suggest a biological rationale for differences in performance while *Academically Adrift* makes no direct argument. However, *Academically Adrift* like many such publications works within the achievement gap frame, deploying a language of static racial identity correlated with assessment results without considering whether the decisions being made from those assessment results are valid.<sup>[3]</sup> In the end, the achievement gap frame can be difficult to challenge because administrative audiences gravitate to stories that rely on statistical evidence that seems irrefutable.

In addition to the multicultural frame and the achievement gap frame, other frames that circulate in academic contexts include the post-racial frame and a post-structural frame. In the post-racial frame—a frame that students often work within—racial identity should no longer be a factor in selection processes because U.S. culture no longer operates through the lens of racial prejudice (Trainor, 2008; For a critique of color blindness, see Bonilla-Silva, 2006). In the humanities and social sciences, it is not uncommon to find researchers working within a post-structural frame in which identity is a fluid, discursive construction that has meaning in cultural contexts only because individuals in those contexts assign value to racial constructions (Hall, 1996). Other faculty may bring an anti-racist frame or a culturally-responsive one (Ladson-Billings, 1997). For social scientists like John in Health Policy, race may be a social construction, but it has very real material consequences as related to access to healthcare, quality of care, health outcomes, and legal and Civil Rights implications. For faculty like John, I do not need to bring him a theory of race from composition studies; he already has an understanding of race that is meaningful in his disciplinary context.<sup>[4]</sup> He needs my help integrating writing in ways that will help his students better engage with those issues.

In the end, all of the above frames have meaning to the audiences who deploy them, and we are unwise not to acknowledge that these frames shape individuals' views of teaching diverse populations. Each frame provides the language and logics that make certain conclusions seem commonsensical. What interests me is not locating one "right" frame for race but identifying a frame that allows for meaningful discussions of teaching writing to diverse students. For example, none of the above frames tells us how to turn the heated Health Policy discussion in John's class into a meaningful writing assignment. In what follows, I suggest ways that we can reframe race in our work with faculty, administrators, and students across the curriculum. My suggested reframing of race draws on three inter-related principles: (1) making race local, (2) identifying

expectations, and (3) acknowledging the racial aspects of linguistic diversity and its meanings in the disciplines.

## A Frame for Race and Writing Across the Curriculum

Brian Huot (2002) argues that assessment of writing should be site-based, locally-controlled, context-sensitive, rhetorically-based, and accessible. Huot's taxonomy is a good model for thinking about how we might reframe race in WAC scholarship; reframing race means reframing the way we think about teaching and responding to student writing across the disciplines. My proposed frame is about what race means in teaching writing, not a theory of race that sits outside of writing. Such a frame makes research locally meaningful, whether we focus on classroom or program-level concerns. Thus, the stories that we should tell about race and writing are ones based on the specific needs of students and teachers at our specific institutions. The research we propose should be based on sound principles of writing research, namely that writing is a rhetorical act, shaped by our linguistic-cultural backgrounds. The writing instruction we advocate—be it assignment design, peer review practices, or assessment—should not be based solely on generic best practices, but on practices attuned to the contexts in which writing is taught at our institutions and the students who are the recipients of that instruction. Finally, the conclusions that we draw about students' writing abilities across the curriculum should be validated at our institutions with our own values and not solely through external measures.

### Situating Race Locally

Instead of starting with generalizations about teaching writing to racially diverse student populations, it is better to start with discussions about local students and local needs. By describing specific students—students in our classrooms and programs—we can root our conversations locally, where all teaching and assessment stories should begin. The specificity of these discussions is key because terms like "international" or "minority" do not really give us much useful information in these local situations. Moreover, it's too easy to over-generalize our students' motivations and performances when we use generic labels. Instead, a conversation that begins as follows is more helpful:

The students in my Health Policy class include two African American women, four Euro-American men and four Euro-American women, two Asian American women, and two men from India. In talking to my students, I've found that at least half of them know another language and use it on a regular basis. One of the African American women comes from a privileged background and already has a job with a pharmaceutical company. The other African American woman is a returning student; she's interested in becoming a hospital administrator. Of my Euro-American women, one is a former nurse and a widow whose husband died in Iraq. The other three women are traditional college-age students who are interested in pursuing a Masters degree in Health Administration. One of those students speaks Russian at home and is interested in health policy because her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Of course, we often need help in figuring out how to elicit such information from students, especially in large classes. Informal writing prompts can be used to gather some of this information. Rather than using close-ended surveys, I prefer to use open-ended writing prompts so that students can articulate their identities in ways that make sense to them (Although research such as by Araiza, Cárdenas, & Garza, 2007, show that surveys can yield very good context-specific information). Asking students to articulate their identities in ways that make sense to them provides us emic descriptions of identity.

By describing students with greater specificity in our classrooms, we will likely find that initial notions about race become more complicated. Those more complicated notions of race allow us to respond more

meaningfully to student writing. For example, a first year writing teacher explained in a WAC workshop how a peer review discussion went awry when a Dutch Indian student who grew up in Tanzania used the term "mulatto" in her essay. What was the student's reasoning in selecting the term "mulatto" and how could the instructor guide a class conversation in such a way that would acknowledge the various ways that different students understood that term and its historical legacy in different national contexts?

Working locally, we will also likely find that within the disciplines, the monolithic constructions of students starts to pull apart. For example, my colleagues in the sciences do not simply work with "Asian" students in their labs. They work with Indian-American, Indian, Chinese, Taiwanese, Asian-American, and American-Sri Lankan students who come with various linguistic backgrounds (and possibly cultural expectations about the nature of scientific research). Each of those students brings specific writing needs that cannot be addressed with broad characterizations as English as Second Language (ESL) learners or as "Asian" students.

Finally, by describing the students in our programs with greater specificity, we can design multiple levels of support that are meaningful to those populations. For example, if our students are Hmong, Generation 1.5 learners from the local area, then how does that make us rethink the guidance we are giving new teachers about responding to student writing, training our teachers about peer review, and what kinds of program support we need for these new teachers to help them support the local Hmong students who are in our classrooms?

In the end, asking about context-specific demographics allows us to think about racial identity as more dynamic, especially when we bring together "domestic diversity" and "international diversity." It also allows us to make connections to the multiple, shifting identities that students bring to writing classrooms (Canagarajah, 2004).<sup>[9]</sup> Most importantly, by reframing race as one situated within the specific contexts in which we teach writing, we can move to specific strategies for teaching writing across the curriculum that are attuned to the identities of the students at our institutions.

### **Understanding What Expectations We Bring To Writing Instruction**

Once we have greater specificity as to our understanding of students in our classrooms, then we can design writing instruction that is better suited to those students. The next question, then, is how good are those assignments and our assessments for our students? Rather than explaining differences through static identity groupings, it's more useful to consider what expectations teachers and students bring to rhetorical situations across the curriculum. Turning questions of difference into moments of dialog aligns with WAC's emphasis on "pedagogical reform rather than curricular change" (Townsend, 1994, p. 1301); our goal is to help improve the teaching of writing, not tell departments what their students should be writing.

On one hand, it's simple enough to argue that students come with different motivations to learn and different ability levels. Some students adjust more easily to the expectations of a writing intensive class, for example, than others. Differences in writing development are normal; learning to write is a complex activity and students' personal and cultural identities sharply affect their relationship to writing (Herrington & Curtis, 2000; Ivanič, 1998; Inoue, 2012). Problems arise, however, when systemic barriers or our own biases lead to erroneous conclusions about race and writing ability. Race does not cause individuals to perform in certain ways, but racial stereotypes can influence the actions of teachers and students.

What is needed is a better understanding of what expectations faculty and students bring to writing classrooms. For example, at one institution where I gave a workshop, instructors of the first year seminar courses brought up the subject of race; African American, Native American, and Latino/a students in their first year writing classes needed more help but would not approach them, they explained. After some discussion, I found that instructors were making an implicit connection between students' races and a university-sponsored bridge program. They assumed that all Latino/a, Native American, and African American students in first year courses were from the bridge program and came with a common set of

writing issues. I questioned if they were making assumptions about students too quickly and ignoring the writing needs of other students—namely, white and Asian students who were also in the bridge program.<sup>61</sup> We also talked about how their expectations for those students—expectations that those students came to recognize very quickly—effectively shut down dialog about teaching writing with those students.

While the notion of stereotypes may seem simplistic when discussed in general terms, stereotype research has actually been quite compelling when done in context. Stereotype research on teaching practices has shown that stereotypes do impact teaching and learning (McKown & Weinstein, 2007; Rose, 1989; Pollock, 2001; Ferguson, 1998). Sandra Kamasukiri (1996), for example, showed that teachers' attitudes towards language use had a direct impact on the way that they taught students. Meredith Bulinski et al. (2009) found that white teachers provided more comments to white students than to students of color but that Latino/a students received more comments on grammar than other students. What was surprising in the Bulinski et al. study was that white teachers typically shied away from commenting extensively on the writing from students of color. Arnetha Ball (1997), on the other hand, found that African American teachers were more likely to score the writing of African American students lower than white teachers because of their sense of expectations for writers.

The research on teachers' assessments of second language writing is mixed. Donald Rubin and Melanie Williams-James (1997), for example, found that raters favored Asian writers over other native writers. On the other hand, they also found that teachers' ratings of non-native writers "were best predicted by the number of surface errors they detected" (p. 139). And Deborah Crusan (2011) in a study involving more than 100 faculty across the disciplines found that altering racial/national identifications on student papers influenced the scores that readers gave to writers; scorers gave writers who they believed were born in the U.S. lower holistic scores on their essays.

In addition to research on teachers' assessment practices, Claude Steele's research on stereotype threat (1997) has been influential in understanding how students bring stereotypes to learning contexts. According to Steele (1999), stereotype threat is "the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype" (p. 798). Contrary to the belief that low-achieving students are likely to have difficulty on academically difficult tasks, Steele has shown that students who are aware of stereotypes about their group and who highly identify with a domain—e.g., school ("high achievers")—are the students who are most likely to be affected by "threat." It is not that such students believe the negative stereotype; quite to the contrary, such students understand that the negative stereotype is a social construction of their identity, not an actual representation of their ability. As Claude Steele and Josh Aronson (1995) write, "It is important to understand that the person may experience a threat even if he or she does not believe the stereotype" (p. 798). For these students, the desire to overcome the perception of a negative stereotype leads to depressed performance.

Writing researchers have also sought to understand what expectations students bring to writing classrooms. Jennifer Mott-Smith (2009), for example, looked at the experiences of five Generation 1.5 students on a writing proficiency exam and found that her students were keenly that they were labeled as "high risk." Zandra Jordan's research (2012) on African American language (AAL) at a historically black college showed that negative stereotypes were common in such contexts. When Jordan interviewed students about their use of African American language, she found that students characterized AAL as "not professional" and described it as "ignorance that plagues the African American community and allows other races to believe 'we' are less intelligent" (p. 98). Yet, Jordan also found that students did not passively accept negative stereotypes; they sought to change stereotypes, as one student explained, "I do believe that professors should realize that students come from different walks of life. . . speaking 'African American English' is a cultural thing, not meant to harm anyone" (2012, p. 98).

In my own work (2006) on racial stereotypes and writing assessment, I found that students were aware of stereotypes about race and academic performance. What is telling about research on ethno-linguistic stereotypes from students' perspectives is the persistence with which students feel stereotypes are perpetuated and their resistance to those stereotypes. The research also suggests that students carry their understandings of stereotyping into subsequent classroom interactions. For example, in a study conducted by Geoffrey Cohen, Claude Steele, and Lee Ross (1999), they found that African American students did not respond to the typical "buffered" feedback offered by white teachers. Students did not believe in feedback that they perceived to be insincere platitudes. Instead, Cohen, Steele, and Ross found:

When feedback was accompanied both by an invocation of high standards and by an assurance of the student's capacity to reach those standards, Black students responded as positively as White students and both groups reported enhanced identification with relevant skills and careers (p. 13)

In sum, both teachers and students bring raced expectations to educational contexts, and those expectations shape the ways that teachers respond to student writing and the ways that students respond to teacher feedback. Often simple practices in understanding stereotypes can lead to meaningful changes in practice. For example, simply counting the kinds of comments we provide different students provides a self-assessment tool for understanding how we respond to writing. Likewise, getting students to articulate their own assumptions about learning and disciplinary content can reveal their raced expectations.

Situating race locally is critical, but only a starting point. Understanding what expectations we bring to writing classrooms—be they first-year writing courses, writing intensive courses, or disciplinary courses in which writing plays a role—is important if we are to think about what kinds of changes we can make in teaching practices. Rather than thinking of race as an added complexity to WAC workshops or individual consultations, a focus on the raced expectations that we bring to classrooms can improve teaching and even lead to department-led initiatives to better support student writing in the major.

### **Understanding the Connection Between Multilingualism and Race**

The third element in reframing race across the curriculum is paying attention to the connection between multilingualism and race. In making the connection between language and racial identity, however, we cannot explain linguistic and rhetorical practices through essentialized cultural explanations. Instead, I want us to think about how to make connections between home and professional literacies. In doing so, I want us to pay greater attention to how our characterizations of linguistic diversity are often raced in subtle ways. As Lan Hue Quach, Ji-Yoen O. Jo, and Luis Urietta, Jr. (2009) argue, "U.S. linguisticism creates inferior identities for nonnative English speakers and ethnolinguistic minority groups . . . Policing Standard English as the only valid linguistic form subordinates and devalues the identities and experiences of ethnolinguistic-minority students" (p. 121).

In disciplinary writing contexts, there are many instances when paying attention to the racialized assumptions of linguistic diversity is critical. In professions such as Health Policy understanding linguistic diversity is enormously important. As John explained to me, hospital administrators as well as nurses, doctors, and other hospital workers interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Too commonly, misconceptions arise based on patients' linguistic practices—misconceptions that are located at the intersection of a patient's linguistic and racial identities. Those misconceptions can lead to disastrous consequences, or at the very least, distrust of the healthcare system. Thus, teaching Health Policy students about that connection between race and language use and its implications for professional practice are an essential part of disciplinary education.

Two bodies of literature are useful in integrating linguistic diversity and its racial implications in WAC practice. First, we can draw on the large body of research in linguistic, education, and writing studies on the

rhetorical and language patterns of various groups. Such research, for example, has shown us that language patterns are codified and taught, often implicitly through everyday practice. For example, Shirley Brice Heath's ethnography of families in Roadville and Trackton, *Ways With Words* (1983), illustrates the ways that children learn to use language through the patterns and practices found in their own families. Some of these practices map onto language and literacy practices found in school while many do not. Thus, for scholars like Heath, writing is a cultural practice and the diversity of language use is a cultural resource, not error-ridden linguistic patterns that need to be swept away (see also Taylor, 1983; Purcell-Gates, 2007; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). Narratives by Keith Gilyard (1991) and Victor Villanueva (1993) critique the ways that attempts to eliminate linguistic variation reap social and personal tolls and remind us that purely cultural explanations for writing practices do not sufficiently account for the personal and social ways that individuals use language.

Second, contemporary theories of multilingualism are valuable. Such theories posit the "multiple and fluctuating character of English as not a single, unchanging world language, or lingua franca, but a constellation of ever changing Englishes" (Horner, Lu, & Matsuda, 2010, p. 2). Multilingual researchers have turned their attention to global Englishes, investigating the varieties of English spoken and written internationally (Lu & Horner, 2004). Even when the end-goal is still Standard English, multilingual theory asks us to consider, "Whose version of Standard English?" Through such questioning, we can move beyond absolutist positions on grammar to practices that recognize language use in context: When and where is linguistic variation a standard part of disciplinary practice? When is it more limited and why? Whose interests are represented in those differences?

Understanding the racialized implications of linguistic diversity, thus, can be a valuable resource for teaching writing in many disciplines. If the goal is to help prepare students for real-world rhetorical situations, then teaching writing across the curriculum means preparing students for the multilingual spaces in which they will be writing and working. In classroom interactions, we can ask students to identify their own grammatical and spelling patterns, noting when and where they find certain patterns more effective and where deviations from a particular dialect can be strategically useful (Young, 2007).

In writing classrooms, a place where difficulties over linguistic variation often surface is in peer review (Leki, 2001). For example, in a biological engineering course I co-taught, students wrote a grant for their final class project. At the end of the semester, students participated in a "study section" that was modeled on the National Institutes of Health process for peer review of grants. In their reviews, students were asked not to make specific comments about the researcher and only focus on the criteria of significance, innovation, and approach. However, when commenting on the writing of Ye-jun, a Korean student, another graduate student (herself a second language writer) commented:

Overall, this proposal is well organized and clearly planned. However, there are many missing words and grammatical errors in the background section – PROOFREAD! (e.g., "every year, it cause over five hundred million people", etc). SCORE: 2.5 (without the language errors, I would give this grant a higher score).

While it is certainly plausible to argue that this writer could have gotten additional editorial help with his writing, the student reviewer's belief that the errors were a matter of the writer's lack of effort (PROOFREAD!) shows a misunderstanding of language use. To our and our students' detriment, we did not take this chance to initiate a class discussion about linguistic diversity in professional contexts. For example, it is worth debating why this reviewer felt compelled to comment and score the grant on a feature that was not indicated on the scoring rubric—a choice that meant this grant would not be funded in our class scenario. Finally, it's useful to ask if such reactions are stronger toward students of certain racial identities than others.

Ultimately, simply asserting that linguistic diversity is a good thing does not help us teach writing better. In fact, many faculty may agree with the spirit of linguistic diversity but reject multilingualism in disciplinary contexts because of the belief that Standard English is the only dialect used in professional work. Thus, in reframing race in relation to linguistic diversity in teaching writing across the curriculum, several points are important. First, the linguistic diversity that our students bring to writing classrooms across the curriculum is a reflection of the shifting demographics of higher education. It does us little good to think of linguistic diversity in terms merely of error. To help students learn writing, we need to recognize that language use is tied to identity and that students may conflate our responding to their writing as a statement about their racial identity. It is not unreasonable to ask students to learn the linguistic conventions used in disciplinary writing, but it's also useful to recognize that those patterns may be broken or "meshed" with other linguistic forms in specific contexts. Moreover, we have to consider what we want to teach students about the connection between linguistic diversity and professional practice. The myth of linguistic homogeneity is strong in the disciplines as English language publishing is now common in many disciplines. But just because Standard English is required for publishing does not mean that it is used all the time in professional practice, and, in fact, encountering linguistic diversity is a normal part of daily practice for many professionals.

## Conclusion

Integrating race in WAC practice has the potential to address very real teaching problems that are experienced by teachers across the curriculum. For this reason, I believe it is essential that we ground discussions of race in local contexts and in ways that have specific meaning for teaching writing. By talking about students in specific contexts, we can help teachers like John develop meaningful writing assignments and assessments of student writing. In John's case, we devised a writing assignment for his Health Policy students in which they were asked to review an informed consent document from a local hospital. Although informed consent is now required for medical procedures, its usefulness remains debated, primarily because many patients do not understand the documentation, and doctors will not treat patients under normal circumstances unless given consent. Students were not asked to speculate how Henrietta Lacks or other patients might read the document. Instead, they were asked to provide their personal interpretation of the document, articulating their analysis through their own identities. Those analyses illustrated the varied expectations that readers bring to rhetorical situations and the subtle ways that race and other identities inform those interpretations. In the end, whether it be researching the expectations that teachers and students bring to writing situations or drawing on linguistic diversity as a resource in contemporary disciplinary practice, re-framing race in writing across the curriculum means being attuned to the contexts in which writing is taught at our institutions and how race is meaningful for us and our students at the institutions at which we teach.

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## Notes

- [1] I use the terms race and ethno-linguistic diversity throughout this article. Although the term "ethnicity" may sometimes be used to distinguish a cultural identity from a national or racial identity, I avoid such distinctions because such terms are not clearly delineated in U.S. culture. Moreover, any ethnic identification is ultimately subsumed in U.S. culture under a racialized interpretation. For my own definition of race, I follow Michael Omi and Howard Winant's (1994) description of racial formations—"a process of historically situated projects in which human bodies and social structures are represented and organized" (p. 55-56). Racial formations, including whiteness, are linked to hegemony and their representations are always in flux.
- [2] My characterization here of multicultural frames does not suggest that all multicultural education approaches work in this way. For example, culturally responsive pedagogy approaches, such as advocated by Sonia Nieto (2010) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1997), take a decidedly more critical perspective.
- [3] I am not suggesting here that we should not be collecting race-based assessment data. Quite to the contrary, race-based data should be collected if needed to make meaningful conclusions about writing assessment results. It is impossible to make valid conclusions about a portfolio assessment, for example, at an ethno-linguistically diverse institution, if data are not collected on students' racial and linguistic identities.
- [4] Many fields that have taken up issues related to identity, especially racial identity. For example, the technical fields include publications such as the *Journal of Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering* that are dedicated to issues related to the teaching of under-represented groups in the sciences and engineering.
- [5] Institutions like George Mason support students' explorations of their multiple identities through publications like *Diversity at Mason: The pursuit of transformative education* (Habib & Mallett, 2011), *Valuing written accents: Non-native students talk about identity, academic writing, and meeting teachers' expectations* (Zawacki et al., 2007).
- [6] As our conversation continued, I wondered if faculty in the disciplines were also linking race to these same students: Why was race linked to writing instruction in one context and not another?

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