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Author

Bucholtz, Mary

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WE DO LANGUAGE

English Language Variation in the Secondary English Classroom

Anne H. Charity Hudley

Christine Mallinson

Foreword by Jacqueline Jones Royster



Teachers College, Columbia University
New York and London

Contents

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nonstandardized varieties of English and who may face language-related challenges in higher education settings (Dunstan, 2013).

Service-learning initiatives, which are increasingly part of students' postsecondary learning experiences (Wurr & Hellebrandt, 2007), can also facilitate partnerships across high school and college lines. Secondary students benefit from these opportunities by being exposed to dimensions of college life and learning, college students benefit from the chance to mentor and give back, and secondary and postsecondary educators can share with and learn from each other. At the College of William & Mary and at UMBC, we both teach service-learning courses. In Anne's course, college students partnered with a special school for middle and high school students who had been suspended or expelled from the general public school population (Charity et al., 2008). These college students were able to mentor the middle and high school students and provide them with support, using the lessons that they themselves had so recently learned and lived. In Christine's course, students interned with high school educators to codesign educational projects on language and culture. In both seminars, students discussed the relationship between language, culture, and education, while at their service-learning sites, they witnessed the importance of mentorship and collaboration and explored the complexities of language in real-world settings. Service-learning also teaches students about professionalism. In order to serve, they must partner with others, communicating with diverse groups and working together in teams. The writing and speaking skills that students use in service-learning experiences are not abstract but rather audience-specific and purpose-driven, which helps foster linguistic awareness and flexibility. In service-learning situations and in other forms of engagement, communication is central.

Service-learning experiences can also connect the multiple audiences who are central to the message of our book, bringing secondary English educators and students together with faculty and students from colleges and universities. In an illustration of this model, Sara Brandt, who teaches senior-level general and AP English, participated in the 2011 Capstone English Academy in Virginia. One of her goals as a high school English educator was to foster her students' college readiness by exposing them to a college environment. Sara partnered with professors at the College of William & Mary to plan service-learning experiences that would benefit the college students as well as the high school students. She brought 12 students to tour campus, meet students and professors, and attend a class in which professors talked to them about the expectations of college, and college students talked about their experiences. Later that year, the college students visited Sara's high school class, where they helped students complete their final multimedia projects. Through this service-learning experience, bridges were

built among secondary and postsecondary students and educators, as well as between secondary and postsecondary institutions.

Service-learning opportunities can also be designed that bring high school students and college students together to conduct research, broadening the real-world and academic skills of both groups. As seen in Box 5.3, sociolinguist and professor Dr. Mary Bucholtz founded an innovative community-based program, School Kids Investigating Language in Life and Society, or SKILLS. The SKILLS program is a partnership that brings together traditionally underserved high school students in Santa Barbara County with high school educators, college students, graduate students, and professors at the University of California, Santa Barbara. As the teams of students and faculty conduct authentic research, students build their skills of data collection and analysis as well as collaboration and teamwork. In addition, the high school educators and the professors make connections across academic institutions, while the high school students receive mentorship that guides them toward college by providing concrete strategies and pathways for success.

BOX 5.3. A SOCIOLINGUIST'S VIGNETTE: Teaching Students the SKILLS of Linguistic Research

Dr. Mary Bucholtz,

Professor of Linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara

The SKILLS program (www.skills.ucsb.edu) is founded on a simple principle: Young people have a wealth of linguistic and cultural expertise that is typically not used, valued, or even recognized in traditional schooling. This expertise can include knowledge of the latest youth slang, the linguistic flexibility of bilingualism and bidialectalism, and the ability to use language effectively to carry out a range of cultural activities in peer group, family, and community settings. SKILLS was created in the belief that students benefit both academically and personally by gaining awareness and appreciation of their own and others' linguistic expertise. The program acknowledges students as linguistic experts by guiding them through the process of carrying out original empirical research on language and culture in their lives. These experiences in turn provide a strong foundation for student-researchers to develop their academic skills as well as their collegiate identities, as they come to realize the value of their linguistic expertise and the excitement and rewards of contributing to the making of new knowledge through research. By forging partnerships with high schools and academic preparation programs such as Upward Bound and AVID, the SKILLS program creates collaborations among university professors, high school teachers, and graduate, undergraduate, and high school students in which everyone is both a learner and an expert.

SKILLS brings graduate students with linguistics training into local high school settings, where they collaborate with high school teachers to develop and implement an inquiry-based curriculum. SKILLS provides a complete curriculum as a starting point, but the teaching team is encouraged to adapt the course structure and content to fit the needs of each school and the interests and expertise of the instructors. As a result, the SKILLS program has been structured in a variety of ways since it was established in 2010:

- A 20-week technology-rich elective social studies class for 15 to 20 Latino/a and Anglo juniors and seniors in a small rural high school
- A weekly after-school enrichment program for a dozen Latino/a sophomores focused on recognizing and challenging linguistic discrimination
- A 3-day-a-week component of a sophomore-level AVID class for over 35 Latino/a and African American students in a large urban school
- A year-long class for approximately 80 Latino/a and African American first-year students through seniors from five high schools throughout the county as part of Upward Bound's Saturday College program on the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) campus

Thanks to a partnership with Santa Barbara City College, a local community college, students in some versions of SKILLS are able to earn college credit for their participation. At the end of the program, the SKILLS student-researchers come to UCSB to share the results of their work with an audience of university faculty and students, school officials, family members, and members of the general public. These presentations are often the first time in their lives that students experience themselves as respected authorities interacting with adults in an academic setting. Their research is also shared with a wider public through the SKILLS website, which also provides curricular materials and university-based research that has emerged from the program.

SKILLS primarily serves public high school students in Santa Barbara County, a population that is largely Latino/a, working-class, and first-generation college-bound. We especially aim to support students who are high-achieving but need additional mentoring and academic preparation to achieve their educational goals. However, the curriculum is designed to be flexible enough to reach students of all linguistic, ethnoracial, socioeconomic, and academic backgrounds. A key goal of the program is to help all students, including those who think they "don't have a culture" or lack any noteworthy linguistic expertise, to realize that nearly all Americans, regardless of background, share a history of linguistic discrimination and language shift due to the rigid language ideologies that have always dominated U.S. culture. At the same time, the program helps students to discover the linguistic flexibility and creativity in the speech of their friends, family, and community members, and to recognize this resource as valuable and even powerful. By focusing on spoken language, SKILLS also fosters students' appreciation of the full range of human linguistic capabilities and complements the emphasis on written language and prescriptive grammar that students encounter in other classes.

In its fullest form, the SKILLS curriculum systematically moves students from an examination of language in their peer groups to language in their families, to language in their local communities, to language in the wider world. The curriculum combines interactive multimedia lectures, in-class discussions and hands-on activities, and step-by-step development of original research projects. The first unit, which focuses on the peer group, introduces the student-researchers to basic linguistic concepts and methods by guiding them through the process of contributing to an online slang dictionary hosted on the SKILLS website, for which they collect and analyze audio recordings of the slang terms that they and their friends use in ordinary conversation. In the second unit, the student-researchers turn their focus to language in the family by conducting an oral history with a family elder on the role of language in their lives, an experience that helps solidify understanding of sociolinguistic phenomena like language shift and also allows students to learn more about members of their own family. In the third unit, the student-researchers form teams and conduct an ethnographic study of language and culture in a local community setting, such as a church, organization, or business; they collect and analyze linguistic and cultural data from fieldnotes, video recordings, and interviews with community members.

The experience of carrying out original research has lasting benefits both for students themselves, as they move toward college, and for the university partners. The data that the student-researchers collect is housed in an archive at UCSB's Center for California Languages and Cultures, where it becomes a resource for further research by faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. In addition, video recordings of classroom activities and an archive of students' classwork and journal writing help us identify which aspects of the program are most effective and which areas need revision.

In short, SKILLS student-researchers gain a great deal from their participation in the program. Not only do they build on their existing linguistic expertise to acquire important academic skills but they also undergo the transformative experience of appreciating the crucial role of language in their own and others' lives. In addition, as producers of original research they are able to witness firsthand the impact of their work as scholars in shaping and transforming our knowledge of language and culture.

Speak Up and Write, Blog, Text, Tweet

In addition to the fact that college-bound students need strong oral communication skills in order to succeed in college environments, they increasingly need to be competent in the use of new literacies, or what the National Council of Teachers of English has called "21st-century literacies" (James R. Squire Office of Policy Research, 2007). The call for students to be capable digital writers is upheld by many organizations who set forth English language standards, including the National Council of Teachers of English and