

Faculty Conversations About Teaching

Supporting Multilingual Learners in Your Classroom

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Namubiru serves as a consultant on Mason's Writing Across the Curriculum committee.

She also is pursuing a doctorate with GMU's Writing and Rhetoric program. Having been an international and multilingual student and now a multilingual instructor, Namubiru is motivated to ensure the success of international students and their faculty.

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What I've Tried

- **Recording reflections:** I ask my students to record oral reflections (2-minute recordings) as a way for them to share their insights and questions before an upcoming discussion or to reflect on previous classes.
- **Asking students about their learning and communication preferences:** At different points in the term, I check in with students and ask them the activities/lessons/assignments they are finding (un)helpful and would prefer to continue using/adding to/removing from the class to help them enhance their understanding and engagement in the class.
- **Providing targeted manageable feedback:** Pointing out every single grammar issue can be cognitively overwhelming, so I first give feedback on ideas and then on grammar if it is impeding meaning. I also predetermine one or two language features that I expect all my students to apply correctly and I share those features with my students giving tips or complete lessons on how to produce them. Then, I focus on those in my students' work. Typically, students will start noticing and consciously producing those features with consistency. Overtime, they can improve in those areas.

What I'm Exploring

- **Using questions to facilitate talking about discipline-specific content:** This semester I am experimenting asking students to jot down questions about the content as part of their notes during class. They are required to share the questions with peers and find answers together in class or right after. Online tools like Blackboard's 'Discussion Board' have been helpful in doing this.
- **Providing multi-modal materials:** I am trying to incorporate more oral texts in my writing and research course by finding (or asking my students to find) talks, videos etc that are discussing the same content in the readings. More listening means students can practice hearing about their concepts from other perspectives while absorbing English from real-world contexts.
- **Incorporating students' native languages at strategic points in the class:** I am considering how to strategically incorporate my students' native languages at specific points in the class so that they are able to express and leverage their multilingual/ multicultural identities to enhance their learning.

Best Practices & Tips

- Ask your students what materials/teaching methods they find helpful in your class.
- Be open to new ways communicating meaning.
- Provide different opportunities for students to participate inside and outside the class and demonstrate their understanding: Could students post or reflect on questions and content ahead of, or after class? Could they bring artifacts? Could they work in pairs or small groups to discuss content?

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Deborah has taught 4 years at Mason + 14 years of teaching in various contexts, including ESL in middle grades, ELA in high school, developmental English and ESL in higher education and preparing future K-12 English teachers.

At Mason, she regularly teaches EAP 506/507/508 Graduate Communication Across the Disciplines, in face-to-face classroom.

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What I've Tried

- **Discussion Leader Presentation:** Students lead the discussion of an academic journal article. They present to the rest of the class using different activities which include rhetorical and language pattern analysis, Socratic discussion, and writing prompts.

What I'm Exploring

- **Metaphor:** Which metaphors do we use to teach research writing to international graduate students? Metaphor is a powerful tool for shaping language and learning. In fact, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) many years ago argued that much of our thoughts and actions in the prosaic encounters of everyday life are situated in metaphor. It follows then that as language educators we rely on metaphor to teach. However, metaphor is implicit and when teaching international students, perhaps we take for granted as natural, commonsense or universal, the metaphors we use to teach. How can we do a better job of making explicit the way we frame research writing in U.S. contexts?
- **Translanguaging:** How can we incorporate more translanguaging in our courses? Since a pluralistic view of English (es) guide our language teaching in EAP 506/507/508, I'm looking for ways to incorporate students' multilingual competencies into classroom activities, the research process and assessment.

Helpful Articles, Books & Interviews

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). "How to Tame a Wild Tongue." In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Aunt Lute Books.
<https://www.everettsd.org/cms/lib07/WA01920133/Centricity/Domain/965/Anzaldua-Wild-Tongue.pdf>
- Garcia-Ponce, E.E., Mora-Pablo, I. (2017). "Discussing the Chaos/Complexity theory from an EFL perspective: An interview with Professor Larsen-Freeman". *MEXTESOL Journal*, 41(3), 1-5.
http://www.mextesol.net/journal/index.php?page=journal&id_article=2525
- Rabbi, S. (2015). Suresh Canagarajah on Translingualism: A Four Part Interview.
<https://transnationalwriting.wordpress.com/2015/08/04/suresh-canagarajah-on-translingualism-a-four-part-interview-part-i/>
- Smitherman, G. (1977). *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Wayne State University Press.

Faculty Conversations About Teaching: Supporting Multilingual Learners

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Aimee Ledewitz Weinstein, D.A. is a Term Assistant Professor of Humanities and Graduate Pathway Advisor with INTO Mason, where she works with International Graduate students on their research writing, transition management and other assorted aspects that characterize a move to a new culture and American university life.

Dr. Weinstein works with the INTO Mason Mentoring Committee and is part of the Mason Faculty Learning Community on the Study of Teaching and Learning, where her research interests lie.

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What I've Tried

- **Peer Review:** I use peer review in my classroom as a speaking/listening activity, not just reading/writing. Students read their essays aloud to each other without the benefit of the listener reading along. They must give feedback orally as well. The one drawback is the myriad of paper topics in my class sometimes creates confusion if they are not familiar with each other's field of study.
- **Practice practice practice.** There is no substitute. If teachers want students to make presentations in class for a grade, then they might provide both impromptu and planned opportunities for speaking and receiving feedback. We often model the behaviors and methods we expect.
- **Transparency:** With the multi-cultural population that I teach, transparency feels crucial. With almost every assignment I give, I tell them why I am giving it and what outcome is expected. We actively discuss how one assignment or lesson leads to another and how they build toward our ultimate goal, which in this case is a poster colloquium at the end of the semester.

What I'm Exploring

- **Google Translate:** In our Department, some of us feel it impedes understanding, while some professors feel it allow students a "way in" to the material.
- **Should Students Speak Only English in the Classroom (or not)?** We are working on students' English skills, in all four domains (reading, writing, speaking, listening) so we constantly ask ourselves about demanding that students speak English in the classroom. If students have a goal of complete understanding and they ask a classmate a question in their first language, a discussion of a concept might ensure. Encouraging discussion of a concept in any language is in the professor's best interest for complete comprehension. But does it preclude advancement of English skills?

Best Practices & Tips

- **Purdue University's Online Writing Lab** has an academic free-use handbook for teaching multilingual writers that is comprehensive: https://owl.purdue.edu/writinglab/faculty/documents/Writing_Lab_ESL_Faculty_Guide_2017.pdf
- **Asking for feedback from the learners** and taking it into consideration is an easy way to make multilingual learners feel both accepted and valued. Sometimes they have excellent suggestions, including recording lectures for later repeated listening, on how to help them with little to no extra effort on the part of the professor!
- **Planning ahead** is always helpful to multilingual students because then they know the expectations and can plan their schedules accordingly if they need some extra time to do the readings or re-listen to lectures.

TRY IT!

How might you apply these ideas, tips & best practices to a course you are currently teaching?

What additional information or resources might you need in order to try it?

For info and guidance, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning (4th Floor, Innovation Hall)

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