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Revisiting the Promise of *Students' Right to Their Own Language*: Pedagogical Strategies

The implications of the *Students' Right to Their Own Language* resolution on classroom teaching and practices point to a continual need to reevaluate how communicative actions—linguistic diversities—of students are central aspects of the work within composition courses. This article revisits the historical significance and pedagogical value of the resolution in its critique of student-teacher exchanges, in its advancement of strategies that invite language variations into composition courses, and in its proposal to support the expressive rights of students.

Black children in America must acquire competence in white English, for the sake of self-preservation: BUT YOU WILL NEVER TEACH A CHILD A NEW LANGUAGE BY SCORNING AND RIDICULING AND FORCIBLY ERASING HIS FIRST LANGUAGE.

June Jordan, *Moving towards Home*

We all have a right to our own language.

José, composition student, Fall 2001

With fervor and a sense of urgency, June Jordan writes of the disparity between linguistic distinctions/labels, and linguistic practices/codes, in her essay, “White English/Black English: The Politics of Translation.” Of concern

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for Jordan is how the proliferation of nonstandard *Englishes* and other languages has been met with a lot of silence, one that positions nonstandardizations (i.e., Black English, non-*Englishes* as first languages, working-class, poverty) as the subordinate Other to standardizations (i.e., Edited American English, wealth, power). For when Jordan writes, “Our Black English is a political fact suffering from political persecution and political malice” (36), she is talking about the subordination and relegation of Black English to otherness just as much as she is talking about the extinction of a communicative tongue that has historically represented the lived experiences of African American people. Additionally, Jordan is talking about the social and political histories surrounding oppression, colonization, linguistic silencing, and the struggle for civil rights.

For Jordan, the struggle for civil rights has always been a struggle to erase the categories of right and wrong in language use, as in her lifelong battles against perpetual threats to the readers, writers, and speakers of Black English and other language forms. In other words, to refuse to delegitimize the languages, cultures, and home discourse practices of “minority” people is to interrogate two myths: that Standard English, or Edited American English, is the correct communicative form that should be used by all American English speakers; and that its users, particularly classroom teachers and researchers, must protect the language from nonstandard practices. Such myths reiterate dynamics of “right”/“wrong,” “correct”/“incorrect” in the presence of multiple languages while reinforcing linguistic homogenization and the neglect of linguistic diversity. However much such myths abound in the presence of linguistic diversity, composition and literacy scholars must ask ourselves: What are we to do to combat such language myths and how are we to engage in this work in the space of our classrooms?

My purposes in writing this article are directly connected to Jordan’s theorization of the preservation of diverse language forms, mainly Black English, in American society. Acknowledging the myths and the ensuing detriments of a Standard English in terms of people’s social relationships, politics, and access to power, Jordan writes:

And what is everybody going to do about it? I suggest that, for one, we join forces to cherish and protect our various, multifoliate lives against pacification, homogenization, the silence of terror, and surrender to standards that despise and disregard the sanctity of each and every human life. We can begin by looking at language. Because it brings us together, as folks, because it makes known the unknown strangers we otherwise remain to each other, language is a process of trans-

lation; and a political process, taking place on the basis of who has the power to use, abuse, accept, and reject the words—the lingual messages we must attempt to transmit—to each other and/or against each other. (“White English/Black English” 38)

Jordan’s concern with both the translation and the transmittance of “lingual messages” speaks to the work of professional organizations whose interests lie at the intersection of theory and practice in the teaching of writing, language, literature, literacy, and communication. One such organization, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, took up the challenge of translating the meanings of a changing national climate—heightened by, for example, the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the 1960s and 1970s social movements, and newly formed educational programs—by

[r]esponding to a developing crisis in college composition classrooms, a crisis caused by the cultural and linguistic mismatch between higher education and the nontraditional (by virtue of Color and class) students who were making their imprint upon the academic landscape for the first time in history. In its quest to level the playing field, U.S. society was making it possible for these students from the margins to enter colleges and universities. (Smitherman, “Historical” 19)

In response to such changes, the members of CCCC passed the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* resolution, proving, in the sentiments of both Jordan and Smitherman, the importance of joining forces in an ever-changing Americanized society.

The history and the promise of the resolution lead to the fourfold purpose of this article: (1) to revisit the historical significance and highlight the pedagogical value of the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* resolution; (2) to offer student-teacher classroom exchanges/vignettes that intersect points of engagement with pedagogical practices supportive of language diversity; (3) to advance strategies for affirming language variations in composition courses; and (4) to propose ways for composition scholars to affirm and support the expressive rights of students.

1. A theoretical discussion of *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* (SRTOL)

In April 1974, members of CCCC officially adopted the *Students’ Right to Their Own Language* resolution. The original purpose of the resolution was to provide “a position statement on a major problem confronting teachers of composition and communication: how to respond to the variety in their students’

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dialects” (inside cover). The resolution was powerful, given the social and political movements redefining American life and calling into question issues of justice and liberation for “marginalized” people before, during, and after the 1960s and 1970s civil and social rights movements.¹ During this historical moment, CCCC waged an organizational campaign to address and better account for the language rights of students, particularly students from communities publicly labeled disadvantaged, poor, working-class, and black (for important research on the interrogation of such labels, see Lee). The policy resolution thus reads:

We affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (Passed by the CCCC Executive Committee in 1972 and by the membership in 1974; first published in *College Composition and Communication*, Fall 1974)

Even before the adoption of the *Students’ Right* resolution thirty-one years ago and since the inception of the organization some fifty-five years ago, composition and communication scholars have sought forums in which to discuss issues of language diversity, language rights, and teaching strategies (current examples are the Modern Language Association; the National Communication Association; the American Educational Research Association; and the National Council of Teachers of English). With professional forums provided to language and literacy educators, issues of “students’ right to their own language” and “to their own patterns and varieties” (*Students’ Right*, inside cover) are widely debated and positions contested. Therefore, it is not surprising that reactions to the resolution were immediate. On one hand, people demanded that the organization rescind the resolution because of its acceptance of students’ *stigmatized* language forms in schools. On the other hand, people praised the resolution and its supporting document as helpful strategies in creating student-centered classrooms and in encouraging students to embrace their dialects and language variety (see Smitherman, *Talkin that Talk*). Regardless

of the outpouring of public and professional reactions, it is significant that the resolution forced people to examine a new style of pedagogy in the education of previously ignored students during the 1970s, when groups of people outside of academe were protesting and fighting for rights. It was a response, however controversial, to the crisis brewing between the ideals of higher education and the realities of nontraditional students entering academic environments. It was a call, directed toward scholars and community activists, for equality in the education of students of color already labeled “disadvantaged,” students entering academic institutions at increasingly high rates.

I believe that the CCCC resolution is valuable in its affirmation of the right of students to language varieties. The resolution is right in calling into question the training and experience of teachers in terms of respecting student diversity in language and geographical location (i.e., home communities). However, the resolution will become less convincing if it remains in the political and social climate of the 1960s and 1970s. While we must remember the fights and struggles of people for civil rights (e.g., the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom), for acceptance into academic spaces (e.g., the arrival of nine black students at Little Rock Central High School in 1957), and for entrance into institutions of higher learning (e.g., James Meredith’s 1962 admission as the first black student to attend the University of Mississippi), we must also use the memories of those events to educate the very students walking through our classroom doors. We need to revisit the *Students’ Right* resolution in responding to the changing landscape of our classrooms, discourse communities, and profession so as to not misrepresent organizational statements and resolutions as decade-specific only. Current professional documents and policies that seek to affirm student differences in dialects and language patterns must consider the work that occurs inside and outside of classrooms as well as the work of literacy education in general.

In considering such work, Geneva Smitherman’s 1987 article “Toward a National Public Policy on Language” highlights how “the unfinished business of the Committee on the Students’ Right to Their Own Language [. . .] to counteract those reactionary sociolinguistic forces that would take us back to where some folk ain’t never left from” (31) speaks to the unfulfilled promise of the resolution. Similarly, in her 1999 article “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle for Language Rights,” Smitherman asserts that as a result of the resolution “you could no longer ignore language and dialect diversity, whatever position you took,

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you had to reckonize” it (372), and, while “the struggle for language rights yet continues, CCCC can win” (374). The significance of returning to the promise of *Students’ Right*, in a climate of oppositional viewpoints on language diversity, affirmative action, immigration, and access to academic resources (see California’s propositions 187, 209, and 227, for example; see also NCTE’s *The Students’ Right to Know*), means that composition scholars can continue to “redefine the meanings of literacy and the meanings of inclusion, that composition studies stands to regain [King’s “legacy and promise”] in heeding Smitherman’s call to begin to celebrate, through engagement, the legacy of rights rhetoric in composition studies” (Bruch and Marback 673).

To talk of a rhetoric of rights is to talk of the struggle over and for rights (e.g., racial, civil, linguistic; see Villanueva, “Maybe”; Ball and Lardner) “insofar as oppression and citizenship, language and democracy, and privileged and

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unprivileged vocabularies are concerned” (Kinloch, “June Jordan” 72). It is also to talk of the redistribution/reallocation of and access to literacy resources for all students, for example high-quality teachers, libraries, writing centers, and educational materials. This rhetoric of rights involves a rethinking of the limitations of a privileged, standardized vocabulary used to theorize racial (in)equality, social (in)justice, and the learning practices of students marked “disenfranchised,” “remedial,” and “underprepared.” It is

this type of work that allows educators to better conceive of and use creative pedagogical practices and methods to affirmatively approach linguistic diversity in classrooms; this work can move us closer to winning the struggle for language and cultural rights (see Smitherman, “CCCC’s Role”; Jordan, “White English/Black English”).

According to Jordan, moving closer to winning the struggle involves appreciating linguistic diversity. In her many published essays and poems, Jordan embraces such diversity, the human connection to word patterns, and writing by celebrating “language [as] a communal means intrinsic to human life” (“White English/Black English” 37). She does not seek to erase the presence and use of “Standard” English from conversations on the politicization of language or the transmittance of lingual messages in in-school and out-of-school environments. Nor does she seek to replace English in America with Black English, “Russian, Hungarian, and Arabic languages” (37). Jordan’s goal is similar to the goal of the CCCC Students’ Right committee: “to heighten

consciousness of language attitudes; to promote the value of linguistic diversity” (Smitherman, “Historical” 20). Jordan promotes this diversity by acknowledging the very factors of Black English and its system of group identification through the rejection of autonomous structures of what she calls “white English.” Jordan’s position on language, difference, and identity points to her own interrogation of a rhetoric of rights that has historically excluded people of color from full participation in academic and political decision-making processes. She writes, “And so I work, as a poet and writer, against the eradication of this system, this language, this carrier of Black-survivor consciousness” (“White English/Black English” 37). Her work, as a writer, complements this “verbally bonding system” of linguistic significations, this rights rhetoric (37), inside of her very own classroom.

In “Nobody Mean More to Me Than You and the Future Life of Willie Jordan,” Jordan chronicles her students’ initial reaction to the Black English of Alice Walker’s character, Celie, in *The Color Purple* as “sounding funny” and “not looking right.” Her students, whose very linguistic speech patterns shared similarities with those of Walker’s character, soon came to translate passages of the novel into Standard English, which taught valuable lessons. First, writers can establish particular identifying factors of characters—“the probable age and sex and class of speakers” (177)—through the manipulation of language. Second, there exist rules, qualities, and guidelines for Black English as for other “verbal systems of communication” (178), including Edited American English. This is but one example of a pedagogy that exposes students to the richness of linguistic systems often deemed nonstandard and incorrect in order for students to be articulate in and appreciative of multiple communicative forms. Jordan’s work with student speakers of Black English points to one way of valuing language variances, by heightening the consciousness of language in the face of fixed, monotonous linguistic labels.

2. The project: Classroom vignettes and student responses

How, then, can teachers of writing use the lessons from Jordan’s classroom interaction with students in ways that promote linguistic diversity? In what ways can the promise of the *Students’ Right* resolution be invoked in this discussion as pedagogical strategies are tested and language differences negotiated? In what follows, I use the *Students’ Right* resolution and supporting text to highlight the academic work in a college composition course at an open-admissions university in Texas. I am not particularly concerned with debating the rights and wrongs of the resolution and/or with rewriting it.² I am con-

cerned with discussing the relationships between students and teachers by using an “interpretive attitude” to highlight the democratic prospects of literacy education and language rights. In *The Constitution of Deliberative Democracy*, Carlos Nino posits the concept of “interpretive attitude” to discuss shared values and commitments, social practices, “deliberative character,” and public participation in a democratic state. On adopting an interpretive attitude in democratic relations (in government, education, and the public sphere), Nino writes,

Democracy is a social practice, consisting of regular conduct and predictable attitudes. These practices make up institutions that in turn are oriented toward a certain goal or value. We cannot participate thoughtfully in the practice, nor can we understand it as intelligent observers, if we do not adopt an interpretive attitude, putting the conduct and attitude in the light of certain goals or values. (9)

Composition scholars could benefit from using Nino’s “interpretive attitude” to keep alive the democratic promise of *Students’ Right* and to implement its lessons inside classrooms so as to participate in and understand as observers the literacy acts of students. A renewed commitment to the resolution is a commitment to having conversations with students about linguistic systems and democratic values established in communities, classrooms, and other spaces of public participation. For thanks to its democratic promise “SRTOL left its imprint on composition studies, causing the field to develop greater consciousness of language politics, greater sensitivity to the multiple voices of students, and greater appreciation for the language and cultural background of a pluralistic society” (Scott and Kinloch 710).

To use Nino’s “interpretive attitude” to further articulate the democratic promise of the *Students’ Right* resolution, I describe specific lessons from one composition course, collectively followed by critical analyses, as upholding the need to affirm the rights of students to their own language varieties. It is my belief that educators should experiment with the challenges presented in the resolution to find supplemental ways of educating students whose diversity is either (un)marked by cultural, racial, linguistic, and/or literate practices.³ Neither the resolution nor the Executive Committee can be blamed for bringing into greater institutional awareness the demands of responding to students’ language variety. At the same time, supporting the resolution without using its lessons to either frame or challenge academic practices is detrimental in its oversimplification of linguistic diversity. For it is Smitherman who, on recalling her involvement with the CCC resolution committee, writes, “The charge

to scholar-activists was to campaign for the wider social legitimacy of all languages and dialects, and to struggle [. . .] to bring about mainstream recognition and acceptance of the culture, history and language of those on the margins” (*Talkin That Talk* 384). This charge speaks to Nino’s call for an interpretive attitude that recognizes democracy as a social practice grounded in justice, participation, conduct, and acceptance. Nino’s own interpretive attitude parallels with my idea of democratic engagement in terms related to the signification of “relationships, conversations, and experiences, grounded in mutual exchanges, people have with one another” as multiple competing discourses are negotiated (Kinloch 10). Insofar as *Students’ Right* is concerned, justice, conduct, and democratic engagements surface in classroom interactions with students and teachers just as much as in assessment measures that test students’ acquisition of knowledge (legislated national and state testing) and in students’ affiliated involvement in home communities (with families and friends, at their jobs, in community centers).

The need to reinterpret Smitherman’s fundamental concept of “being on the margins” is just as important today as it was during the adoption of the *Students’ Right* resolution. This reinterpretation involves increased public and professional understanding of literacy and language in the academic spaces of classrooms and the habitable spaces of people’s communities. Such an understanding would justify a rhetoric of rights predicated upon equity, equality, opportunity, access to quality resources, and investment in an economy of emerging literacies and multiple languages. This could produce democratic engagements supportive of Nino’s interpretive attitude inside of composition classrooms.

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Classroom vignette 1

One morning I walked into my composition class in Houston only to meet students looking out of the window at the faculty parking lot and talking about how “the damn bayous always be running over when it rains.” Without realizing that I had already entered the classroom, one student remarked, quite interestingly, that the university building was on the margins in much the same ways that they (my students) were on the margins. I interrupted by asking, “What does it mean to be on the margins?” And as they turned to look at me before taking their seats, the same student said, “Why, when I say something about what I understand an author to be saying, do I get crazy looks from

people acting like they don't understand me? Do those looks mean my language is on the margins? Probably so 'cause people don't understand my point." Another student, in disagreement with the aforementioned student, remarked, "Being on the margins don' have to mean gettin' certain looks from people 'cause of what you say 'bout a reading. It has more to do with who's talkin' and what language form that person's usin' . . . the more proper or standard or the more you sound like the teacher, the more respect."

And so this is how my class began. A class session not intended to directly focus on "being on the margins" or on "Standard English [and] sound[ing] like the teacher," but one that quickly became involved with language rights and, in the sentiments of another student, "the right to use language to deny being on the margins." Over the next few weeks, we decided to focus more on how students should have a right to their own language and how the classroom can serve as a place where such a right is interrogated for meaning in the larger public sphere. Let me offer an example of a classroom engagement:

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In advocating for "students' right to their own language," I quickly learned that I needed to advocate for student participation in selecting course readings.⁴ My students and I spent one in-class and one out-of-class session devising a list of reading material that, in some way or another, addresses language issues. I compiled suggestions and asked for student volunteers to be responsible for bringing into class a selection from the list. Some students volunteered to bring in chapters from Pat Mora's *Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle* while others volunteered to bring in chapters from Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary*, Studs Terkel's *Race: How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel about the American Obsession*, Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin that Talk*, Luis Rodríguez's *Always Running: La Vida Loca*, Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, and Stephen Carter's *Integrity*, as well as Robert King's "Should English Be the Law?" and Amy Tan's "Mother Tongue." Another student (hereafter referred to as "José"), who had remained silent for some time, offered to bring in and lead class discussion on June Jordan's essay "Problems of Language in a Democratic State." So Jordan's essay led in our class discussion of language rights.

On the day of José's presentation, he opened by reading the following passage from the Jordan essay:

Nevertheless and notwithstanding differences of power, money, race, gender, age and class, there remains one currency common to all of us. There remains one thing that makes possible exchange, shared memory, self-affirmation and collective identity. And isn't that currency known and available to everybody regardless of this and that? And isn't that common currency therefore the basis for a democratic state that will not discriminate between the stronger and the weak? And isn't that indispensable, indiscriminate, or non-discriminating, currency, our language? Isn't that so? (223–24)

José then responded:

If I am to believe what Jordan is saying, then I am to believe that we all have our right to language. If I am to read into her quote a bit of sarcasm, then I should know that our common currency, language, is really not that common because it does not make all of us equal or strong or rich. So the basis of this democracy is the common currency of language—the language of power—and that's not Black English Vernacular or Spanglish or mixing French with English for comprehension or writing in Chinese first before translating into English. For the people in power in this democracy, Standard English is superior to all others. And what Jordan really wants to know is what the hell are we doing about it?

Classroom vignette 2

During a class session on critical thinking skills, “Maria” said: “I am a critical thinker, . . . tell me what I need to think about and I can be critical. To be critical is to just give 'em what they want, what they've already said. Not too hard when you think about that. Listen to what they're saying and change the language around. That's critical enough.”

José then recalled his presentation on the Jordan essay a few days before as he prepared his response to Maria's argument. He said, “You know Jordan is right about the problems of language in a democracy. And if we really read what she's saying here, we can apply it to the ways we think about life and access and opportunity. Who wants to pretend to be a critical thinker by having the information dictated to them? That's not learning and that's not acknowledging our right to our own language and the freedom that comes with this right.” A female student, “Claudia,” sitting next to José inserted her position, “We don't know how to talk so we don't know how to be critical. If I'm talking with my accent, I get looks from other people, and they automatically tune me out. They're not taking what I say critically and they're sure not taking my accent as part of my language right.” (Important to note is that when I

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mentioned the terms “institutional dialect,” “syntax,” “phonology,” “morphology,” and “semantics,” Claudia, Maria, José, and others gave me an unforgiving and knowing look. Claudia then said something like, “Yeah, but I’m saying they don’t *listen*, they don’t want to *hear* me”).

Another student, sitting in silence in the back of the room, said, “Well, let’s talk. Where do we begin? Can we talk about how all this language rights we are supposed to have places us in a certain class that many of us can’t seem to get out of?” To this, I asked students to critically reflect on the Jordan quotation from José’s presentation insofar as the reality of class issues is concerned. The reactions to both Jordan’s talk of language and the reality of class proved quite insightful. Students began to talk about their own language as reflective of their class status: “I know that one reason my class level is what it is, well, is because of my *verbal* language. If I can fix that, then I can move out of my class,” insisted “Anthony,” a student in this course. Silence entered the room as heads began nodding in agreement and as I, the instructor, was being looked upon for answers to the dilemmas circulating around language acquisition and, suddenly, class status.

I turned to the Jordan piece and offered an explanatory remark: “In our history, the state has failed to respond to the weak. State power serves the powerful Apparently the minority problem of language has become a majority problem of low-level reading and writing skills” (“Problems of Language” 224–225). Jordan’s discussion of state power and the language of minority peoples parallels the beliefs many of my students have, that power is restricted from people whose language does not represent a standard American form; therefore, class mobility is heavily based on increased language skills. The language skills of many of these students derive from immersion in their culture, mainly the culture of immigrant Spanish-speaking grandparents and parents or working-class black laborers, and as a result class becomes a question of mobility for those who are able to access and utilize Standard English. Students are all too aware of this fact, and their desire for class mobility represents their ongoing struggle to reinvent themselves and their language while they are *inventing the university* (Bartholomae). However much my students attempt to invent the university, they must, at some crucial point, learn the skills necessary to maintain their positions in a university, and such skills include reading and writing competencies, or, as one student eloquently stated, “I can read and I can write. Tell me how I can use my skills to move ahead in

the world without being judged on my accent, my pronunciation of certain words, and on race. You do know that language rights are always tied into race, right?" (See also Delpit.)

Classroom vignette 3

Issues of language and class, as with issues of race, are present throughout the supporting document of the *Students' Right* resolution. One section reads:

Students who come from backgrounds where the prestigious variety of English is the normal medium of communication have built-in advantages that enable them to succeed, often in spite of, and not because of, their schoolroom training in "grammar." They sit at the head of the class, are accepted at "exclusive" schools, and are later rewarded with positions in the business and social world. Students whose nurture and experience give them a different dialect are usually denied these rewards. As English teachers, we are responsible for what our teaching does to the self-image and the self-esteem of our students. (2)

After reading this passage with my class, I awaited their individual responses. Many of them expressed feelings of rage, not because of what the passage says, but because of the reality of class privilege in this democracy. "Minh," a student in the class, shared with us how her Chinese language was considered an "interference" with her acquisition and mastery of Standard Written and Spoken English: "My twelfth-grade English teacher once said: 'You know, Minh, if you want to one day live in power, then you'll have to work on *downplaying* your accent . . . and you must stop using Chinese words and phrases when trying to express a complete thought. If you must, then translate privately, but never make it a public act. Your speech will determine your class status.'"

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Other students in the class became even more enraged after Minh's comment, and wanted to further investigate the *Students' Right* passage in light of one of the course readings on language and class. For the next reading discussion, they unanimously selected bell hooks's "Confronting Class in the Classroom," and Minh volunteered to lead the discussion.

When Minh's presentation day arrived, she asked me to provide an introduction to the piece. Not knowing where my introduction would fit into Minh's discussion, I decided to begin with the following passage from "Confronting Class in the Classroom:" "[A]ny professor who commits to engaged pedagogy

recognizes the importance of constructively confronting issues of class. That means welcoming the opportunity to alter our classroom practices creatively so that the democratic ideal of education for everyone can be realized” (189). Minh jumped in by talking about the mantra of class issues in the classroom as representative of controversial fields of contact in which, according to Minh, “students can easily be exposed to others and can feel so uncomfortable if the teacher does not provide the space and time for students to talk about their feelings and hear different reactions from other people in the classroom” (hooks’s engaged pedagogy). Minh made a connection between hooks’s talk of class and the *Students’ Right* resolution’s talk of students from privileged versus nonprivileged backgrounds by saying: “I was offended when my twelfth-grade teacher told me to *downplay* my accent because of what she thinks is my unprivileged cultural background. Well, I think it’s important to know that regardless of language and accent and dialect, we all have a right to our language and the language of social class mobility. I care about my Chinese language and my English language, and I need to know how to nurture them as I move up the class ladder.” At the closing of this class session, another student confessed, “I’m black, I’m male, I’m poor, and yet I speak Standard English. Do I give a damn about differences in language and class? Yeah, I do, because language defines class and class defines social and political status, power, and, in some way, it all defines who we are or who we want to eventually be. But will I give up my right to my own language? Now that I know I have a right, no!”

From this class session and for the remainder of the semester, students productively interrogated the fundamental principles outlined in both the Jordan and the hooks essays, and their doing so is demonstrative of how language

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and class issues can motivate students to critically reflect on their own experience while cultivating their own expressive powers through methods of inventiveness and analysis. They reread the essays, bringing into subsequent class sessions highlighted paragraphs to share with one another; they questioned

Jordan’s statement, “I believe that somebody real has blinded America in at least one eye. And, in the same way that so many Americans feel that ‘we have lost our jobs,’ we suspect that we have lost our country. *We know that we do not speak the language*” (“Problems” 232). Additionally, the students made connections between Jordan’s emphasis on language being a common currency and hooks’s implication that people need to talk about class distinctions by

using language. One student even brought into class a quotation from Toni Morrison's *Lecture and Speech of Acceptance, Upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature*, and as he stood tall to read a passage from the text, everyone fell speechless. He stated, "Since we're talking about the power of language this semester, about how students do have a right to their language, and about how we can use language to talk about issues like class, I brought in something to share." He then said, "Toni Morrison writes, 'We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we *do* language. That may be the measure of our lives'" (22).

Lessons from the vignettes

Clearly, "we do language." In doing language, my students and I confront issues of language abuse inside the writing classroom. When students become silent after reading a text on language and class issues, when they make use of their native languages and dialects (see Elbow) to assert their beliefs the best way they can, when they turn to the course texts in search of a deeper meaning, and when they take classroom work into their homes and communities, bringing back other people's reactions, then we are doing the work required of an engaged pedagogy. We are participating in a rhetoric of rights. We are reading, talking, discussing, sharing, and writing about issues circulating around language rights, but more important we are confronting our own sense of reality, which often gets ignored in classrooms. We are, in the sentiments of Karla Holloway in "Cultural Politics in the Academic Community: Masking the Color Line," confronting the very lived realities comprised in our ever-so-expanding classrooms: "Our classrooms are populated by the 'them' we once studied. Those we theorized about [. . .] not only are in front of the classroom, but are now its students" (611). Holloway goes a step further to assert that educators should

[e]mbrace to our own ends the identity politics—the perspectives of race, culture, gender, and ethnicity—inherent in language. We can claim the power of our voices, and their complexity, *and their complexions* to assert the dimensions of our concerns, to call attention to our successes in vitalizing the community of the university—both its faculty bodies and its student bodies. (617)

This type of engagement, whereby teachers are embracing the politics of language identity and students are sharing their perspectives on language diversity, represents a vital intersection of Nino's interpretive attitude, Jordan's legitimization of black English and *languages*, and the adoption of the *Students' Right* resolution: the availability of a public discourse to talk about educational and political concerns is often absent shared democratic values when

groups of people do not participate in evaluating and reimagining the possibilities of our commitments. In the sentiments of Nino, an interpretive attitude would mean that we are publicly confronting tensions surrounding, for example, the politicization of language rights, linguistic diversity, and democratized systems. I seek not to oversimplify the case for linguistic diversity in classroom practices by encouraging teachers to wear an interpretive attitude and go on about the business of teaching. What I want to do, as evidenced by my involvement with writing students, is to reimagine our educational commitments, our shared values, in ways that mobilize public and professional attitudes circulating around the education of monolingual and multilingual students. This mobilization, I believe, needs to be grounded in linguistic and cultural negotiation and not in a wrong language/right language debate.

An interpretive attitude allowed me to accept responsibility “for what [my] teaching does to the self-image and the self-esteem of our students” (*Students’ Right* 2) as students produced classroom work using traditional academic writing, a combination of academic writing with linguistic varieties, and mixed-genre writings.⁵ They used their multilingual and bidialectal voices to discuss, debate, and reflect on course readings, to make meanings, and to construct sophisticated written and verbal arguments. By the semester’s end, they all embraced *Students’ Right*, witnessed how the resolution could indeed be implemented inside a classroom focused on student involvement and student voice, and they all agreed with James Berlin, in “Composition Studies and Cultural Studies” that “[r]hetoric, after all, was invented to resolve disputes peacefully, as an alternative to armed conflict, and it remains the best option in a perilous time” (116).

Our collective endorsement of Berlin’s belief in rhetoric, along with our “interpretive attitude,” to borrow Nino’s phrase, taught us valuable lessons as we established connections between language and struggle, language and cultural and academic selves. Minh articulated her frustration not with language, but with the teachers and academic systems that alienated her cultural and linguistic registers from classroom practices, forcing her to immediately assimilate into “a language of otherness that doesn’t acknowledge the history of my people.” José, obviously moved by Minh’s comment, responded, “If we [students] must master . . . the codes of power . . . standard English . . . academic writing . . . pass all the tests, for the classes and the state, then shouldn’t there be an awareness of our conditions, our languages, our lives and literatures, by teachers?” A different student interrupted, “By the whole system, José, by the whole system!”

José, Minh, and the other students were in agreement. José then asked if we could return to hooks's article, "Confronting Class in the Classroom." He pulled out the article along with hooks's text, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (as students snickered, "Man, you bought that book? You trying to outdo us?"). He read the selected passages:

Students who enter the academy unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values held by privileged classes tend to be silenced, deemed troublemakers. ("Confronting Class" 179)

To avoid feelings of estrangement, students from working-class backgrounds could assimilate into the mainstream, change speech patterns, points of reference, drop any habit that might reveal them to be from a nonmaterially privileged background. ("Confronting Class" 181)

Coming to Stanford with my own version of a Kentucky accent [. . .] I learned to speak differently while maintaining the speech of my region, the sound of my family and community [. . .]. In recent years, I have endeavored to use various speaking styles in the classroom as a teacher and find it disconcerts those who feel that the use of a particular patois excludes them as listeners, even if there is translation into the usual, acceptable mode of speech. Learning to listen to different voices [. . .] challenges the notion that we must all assimilate. (*Talking Back* 79)

After his reading, students discussed hooks's journey to enter a world different from her "nonmaterially privileged" world in the South and the struggles that resulted. One student made the connection between hooks's efforts to maintain her home practices and Jordan's argument to embrace the language, culture, family, community, and rights that are ours as we work to erase boundaries of right/wrong, standard/nonstandard. This discussion was met with a peculiar student request: to devise a resolution on student willingness to be a part of an academic community. The following is what resulted:

1. Students, hereafter referred to as "we," are willing to negotiate who we are, the languages we speak, and the codes we use only if this negotiation is embraced in the classroom as "negotiation" and not "abandonment";
2. We are willing to accept and critically engage in academic challenges that promote various theories and conventions as long as we are not prohibited from making our own meaning and producing our own

arguments that may, at times, oppose or challenge traditional arguments and positions;

3. We are willing to work, even struggle if need be, to understand the content as long as this struggle includes working with both content and spoken discourse—we don't want to privilege one by devaluing the other. We know this may be hard, so we'll appreciate all attempts;
4. We are willing to embrace the language diversity and variety of the people in this class so we can prepare ourselves to accept the variety of other people we will eventually encounter. We refuse to believe that we are linguistically inferior.

This student-devised resolution allowed other lessons to emerge during the remainder of the academic semester. More specifically, we agreed that to be on or at the margins (see Vignette 1) does not have to mean that students are “linguistically inferior” or “underprepared.” My students have helped me to realize that being on or at the margins is to occupy a space of critical inquiry, one that moves beyond labels of inequality, social injustice, and marginalization and into relationships of reciprocity, linguistic virtuosity, and understanding: “And humanity tells us that we should allow every [person] the dignity of his [or her] own way of talking” (*Students' Right 18*).

Additionally, we learned that invention of the university does not mean that students, and teachers alike, should deny who they are and whence they come (our Class Resolution 1). Nor does it mean that the ways students learn

My students asked me to honor our resolution, their language rights, as they agreed to honor, with questions, my teaching practices and academic assignments.

of and eventually come into academic discourse communities of critical inquiry depend on the denial of dialect diversity: “Diversity of dialects will not degrade language nor hasten deleterious changes. Common sense tells us that if people want to understand one another, they will do so” (*Students' Right 18*). Students, using various dialects and language forms, can contribute to the mission of pedagogically sophisticated classrooms at the same time that their messages are received and recognized (the student resolution on willingness is a good example of this). My students asked me to honor our resolution, their language rights, as they agreed to honor, with questions, my teaching practices and academic assignments. It was a difficult, yet successful semester.

3. SRTOL, points of engagement, and pedagogical practices

The success of the semester unveiled itself as we began to trust one another, thus, divulge critical information about our identities. I remember one student sharing her journal entry on the consequences of not doing language (a message from Morrison's *Nobel Lecture* speech). As she scrambled through her entry, trying to make sense of her writing in light of the arrows, marginal notes, and scratched-out sentences, she frustratingly stopped and asked to be skipped over. Without hesitation, her writing partner said, "No! Just read it." What she eventually shared with the class was her social location: she was a resident of a local barrio, a first-generation college student, a fluent Spanish and Spanglish speaker, and the only fluent English speaker in her extended family. She then said that to not do language was not a part of her vocabulary and experience, and she could not understand how people could not do and love and feel language, "the only thing that heals the pain."

She sat, and nothing in the room moved, until Anthony's hand went up. He thanked this student for her honest reflection and then informed us of his social location: he was a resident of the third ward, a historic black inner-city community, son of working-class parents, and a user of "any language form I can get my hands on." Anthony's connection to language comes from his interaction with the people, his "street mentors" in his community, who can smooth-talk one minute and theorize the next. Anthony and the other student speakers and listeners reminded me that any classroom teacher who wants to confront language issues circulating around the politics and the teaching of writing must acknowledge, trust, and value students as knowledgeable people from various discourse communities.⁶ They also taught me that listening to and critiquing students' realities can lead to self-reflection and critical consciousness of differences as an increased sense of agency for students, teachers, and governing systems is established.

In drawing on the plethora of knowledge students have and can bring into the classroom, I turn to Smitherman and her invitation to educators to reflect "How can I use what the kids *already* know to move them to what they *need* to know? This question presumes that you genuinely accept as viable the language and culture the child has acquired by the time he or she comes to school" (*Talkin and Testifyin* 219). Smitherman's assertion legitimizes the va-

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rieties of linguistic and cultural diversity that intersect with dynamics of privilege, identity, and schooling. In this way, the dilemma of *Students' Right* becomes a concern for how composition scholars locate meaningful teaching practices inside of classrooms while asking the questions: What else could the resolution say about language variety? How else could the resolution challenge educators to adopt a rights rhetoric of and for student differences/voices inside classrooms? And how far is too far for educators to go in discussing and advocating the rights and values of students?

The contributions of José, Minh, Anthony, and the other students to class conversations on language prove that, at times, going too far is not going far enough. Their honest responses to class readings, discussions, and journal reflections on topics ranging from “being on the margins,” “social class (im)mobility,” and “a privileged language” speak directly to the politics of teaching writing in these United States, given our national history with social injustice. So, writes Smitherman,

One major result of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s was the creation of educational policies to redress the academic exclusion of and past injustices inflicted upon Blacks, Browns, women, and other historically marginalized groups. Programs and policies such as Upward Bound, open enrollment, Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs), preferential/affirmative action admissions, and the development of special academic courses (‘basic’ writing) brought a new and different brand of student into the college composition classroom. (“CCCC’s Role” 354)

The politics of teaching writing require educators to recall, as Smitherman does, the social movements and educational policies birthed in the 1960s and 1970s so as to complicate our thinking about writing, reading, language, and literacy practices. In “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle for Language Rights,” Smitherman presents the reality of the new student with a different, albeit nontraditional, Americanized culture. In *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*, Victor Villanueva, Jr., goes a step further in talking about the new student, whether Latina/Latino, Puerto Rican, or African American, as not so new, and not so foreign, and he uses himself and his linguistic fluencies as examples. In this mixed-genre autobiography, Villanueva writes of his multilingual skills—as a speaker of English, Black English (or African American Language), Spanish, and Spanglish—as he reflects on the language of other speakers of color:

He looks at the experiences of the African American speaker of Black English, the Spanish-speaking Mexican American, Puerto Rican, or other Latino, and says, “They lack sophisticated speaking skills in the language of the majority.” Then he remembers having spoken Spanish and Black English and the Standard English required at the school, seems like always [. . .] (xiv)

He then chronicles the existing distances (located in assumptions) between teachers and students by recalling an early school experience: “Spanish was taught by Mr. Hauser (trying to teach Spanish to thirty bilingual kids). We didn’t know about dialects, prestige, or the like, just about right and wrong. He was wrong [. . .]” (3).

In relation to Villanueva’s powerful experiences and Smitherman’s talk of the new student is Jordan’s insistence that “Black English is not a linguistic buffalo; as children, most of the thirty-five million Afro-Americans living here depend on this language for our discovery of the world” (“Nobody” 175). We can also turn to Min-Zhan Lu’s confession that “if I watched myself carefully, I would figure out from the way I read whether I had really mastered the ‘languages.’ But writing became a dreadful chore. When I tried to keep a diary, I was so afraid that the voice of school might slip in that I could only list my daily activities” (141–42).

Collectively, Smitherman, Villanueva, Jordan, and Lu encourage us all to critically discuss the democratic possibilities of educating students not simply by avowing differences in language and culture but also by problematizing and complicating them as essential components of academic literacy. One way to do this type of work is to reimagine the promise of *Students’ Right* through our history’s social movements. Another way is to use the resolution to engender multilingual, multicultural, multigenerational perspectives, grounded in critical and creative pedagogies, in the composition class. Either way, we must, according to Lu, “complicate the external and internal scenes of our students’ writing [. . .]. Don’t teach them to ‘survive’ the whirlpool of crosscurrents by avoiding it. Use the classroom to moderate the currents. Moderate the currents, but teach them from the beginning to struggle” (147). How do we complicate and moderate, and how can we effectively *do* such work in our classrooms?

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I offer the following strategies for engaging in such work in the space of academic classrooms. Some strategies have been tested numerous times and have yielded successful classroom discussions and assignments. Others have been partly tested, depending on the course level, readings, and requirements.

1. Invite students to examine the spatial location and demographic trends of their university community juxtaposed with their home community affiliation(s). I begin by asking students to consider such questions as: How would you describe the university in terms of cultural and linguistic practices, male-female attendance, and location within the surrounding community? What does your descriptive observation say about who you are as a member of this academic community? Would you describe the university and the students as multilingual and multicultural, and if so, how are you using such terms? What do the terms signify? (This requires students to consider arguments by Banks, Keith Gilyard, and Baugh, for example).
2. Ask students to listen to the languages of other people (the faculty and student bodies of their university community), by paying attention to and documenting the structures and patterns, codes and language shifts of speakers. What do such patterns and shifts indicate about communicative practices, about the ways people interact with one another, and about “academic” and “nonacademic” conventions? How do you linguistically engage with the members and the nonmembers of your discourse community, and what do such implications imply?
3. Ask students to write out the lyrics to popular songs and invite volunteers to play a sample of the selected songs with the class before sharing the written lyrics (we compare what we hear with what we read). In this comparison, we are listening to and reading the words (form and pronunciation) before analyzing, synthesizing, citing, and even rewriting the content as exercises in revision.
4. Engage students in a discussion of how socioeconomic status and geographic location, or region, influence language practices by listening to music samples of various East and West Coast artists. We take note of how meaning is read as comprehensible and is popularized across linguistic and spatial differences. Students could then write a response to the rap lyrics by considering their own positions juxtaposed with the position(s) of the rapper as writer.

5. Invite students into a discussion of phonology, semantics, syntax, accent, and dialect. This can lead to an examination of the *Students' Right* resolution and various theories of language acquisition, grammar, and vocabulary. It follows that students often become so interested in the topic of language development and rights that they explore the language histories of friends and family members through interviews, surveys, and informal conversations. This strategy can be enhanced if connections are established between the composition instructor and an instructor whose research area is in sociolinguistics, the teaching of grammar, and/or the teaching of the English language. This instructor could be invited to lead a class discussion on the history of the language and the connections of the language to speech acts and writing skills.
6. On occasion, I ask students to listen to recordings of selected poetry and prose read by Langston Hughes, noting how he combines the language of the blues with his oration of the language of everyday people. This has proven very successful, especially in encouraging students to explore the nature of mixed genres and the skills involved in code switching. Writing assignments follow.
7. A most important strategy is to create a comfortable, safe environment in which students trust one another enough to share their beliefs about language diversity. This is not always an easy strategy to fulfill, for it means that we must consciously work at getting to know our students in an abbreviated amount of time. To do this, it is helpful to know students by their first names, to support their collective and individual explorations of language, and to ask for volunteers to lead class discussions and be responsible for a major component of the class work. At the beginning of the semester, work into the culture of the classroom time for freewriting/journal writing. If at the beginning of class, ask students to respond to a topic or a set of topics related to the class readings. Then ask student volunteers to share parts of their entries, sharing that can lead into the class lesson for that day. If at the end of class, remind students that they will be asked to share their responses at the beginning of the next class session, and their sharing can lead into that class lesson. I like to have students see how I consciously connect themes from their journal entries to class lessons and assignments. Throughout the semester, students are invited to return

to earlier journal entries as they brainstorm topics for academic essays, prepare for in-class presentations, and work in groups to analyze pressing issues circulating around language rights.

I have discovered that such strategies not only establish connections between class readings/theories and student realities, but they also encourage students who are normally silent to participate in class conversations. Over time, students become less reluctant to use their own language form in the classroom as they attempt to master the negotiation of home practices with academic practices. The struggles of my students to negotiate indicate my life-long struggle to work at dismantling the social and political dimensions of power, politics, and literacy evident in the larger society (this is a lifelong struggle, indeed). My strategies, then, are influenced by my interpretive attitude (see Nino) to make public the very realities and struggles of students as they become comfortable with their academic identities.

To implement new strategies for working with students means that teachers cannot lambaste their homes or communities or first languages. Experimentation with new strategies points to an awareness of the changing student demographics within the university, changes that require critical conversations about language and writing so choices can be made, arguments supported, context and audience defined, and variations studied. This is the type of work I engaged in with my undergraduate composition students; it is the same type of work I am committed to as I now work with preservice and inservice graduate students and public high school students.

4. Conclusion: Returning to Students' Right to Their Own Language

My overall argument, that communicative actions regarding student differences should become a central part of classroom pedagogy, is a difficult one to put into and keep in practice. I am quite aware that this movement is not easy. As an African American educator familiar with home and academic language variations, I realize the power of language, particularly as it constructs identity and positions people in certain classes.⁷ I am also aware that the discourses of institutional and public politics are profoundly committed to the markers of white middle- and upper-class socioeconomic values that many of my students attempt to imitate in becoming *insurgent* intellectuals (see hooks and West) of mainstream culture. Nevertheless, as I inform my students, becoming *insurgent* intellectuals requires a personal investment in the world of and

the sharing of ideas, however diverse or not, are the methods by which those ideas are presented. And this claim clearly supports the *Students' Right* resolution regarding the affirmation of language varieties students bring into the classroom.

Or, in the sentiments of two of my students: "So you mean, like, I do have a right to speak the way I be speakin' in class, even while I be learnin' a standard?" and "See, them other teachers don' really wanta hear dat from the get go, so I don' be talkin.' They don' know about affirmin'."

My students represent the lives of people whose language variations should be affirmed and respected. They must learn to believe, as we should, that in their language patterns and varieties can be found sophistication, meaning, and power. I am not afraid to tell my students that I know how to code switch and that my primary form of communication is partly influenced by the Gullah culture of the Sea Islands. I am not afraid to tell them that my family members frequently mix "black" English with "white" English, and that I am able to demonstrate mastery of both language forms. Oftentimes, the next question from my students is an inquiry into how they can achieve such mastery in using both the language forms they already know and the language patterns of mainstream society.

As I inform my students, becoming insurgent intellectuals requires a personal investment in the world of and the sharing of ideas, however diverse or not, are the methods by which those ideas are presented.

With this inquiry came our acceptance of their language form as powerful and meaningful. This acceptance forced me to invite students to use their "mother tongues" in the classroom, and they invited me to make use of my "mother tongue" when I felt the need to. Asking students to engage in this process reiterates Peter Elbow's argument:

If we want our students to take on the power of full mainstream literacy, we can never remove the difficulty or even identity anxiety that some of them may experience in having to move past an oral culture (not necessarily to leave it) and take on a culture of literacy. But we can substantially mitigate their anxiety by inviting them to take on *full literacy* in their oral dialect. (372)

I agree with Elbow that our students should be invited "to take on *full literacy* in their oral dialect," which leads me to another valuable lesson: students must be exposed to various forms and expressions of literacy. Lisa Delpit, in *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, asserts, "All we can do is provide students with the exposure to an alternate form, and allow

them the opportunity to practice that form *in contexts that are nonthreatening, have a real purpose, and are intrinsically enjoyable*" (54). Encouraging students to use alternate forms of expression in the classroom can demonstrate the richness of languages in communication, engagement, participation, and understanding in literacy learning.

For example, when I first made use of my "mother tongue" in the classroom, I explained to students that there are many ways of saying the same thing; the significance of which expressive form to use depends on defining the audience and the context. Soon thereafter, students who were silent because of perceived language barriers began to share interpretations of class readings—they began to demonstrate proficiency in language and literacy, but, more important, they began to critically understand the power of the "mother tongue" in an academic environment. As declared by Judge Charles C. Joiner in his order that a school district in Ann Arbor, Michigan, could not use children's language as reason to register them into learning disability courses, teachers must "recognize the existence of the language system used by the children in their home community and to use that knowledge as a way of helping the children to learn to read standard English" (*Martin Luther King Elementary School Children v. Ann Arbor School District Board*).

While my composition students can in fact read Standard English, many of them were initially reluctant to engage in discussions for fear that linguistic (in)competence in Standard English would measure their success or failure. In thinking about my students' fear, I recall Henry Giroux's argument that "the discourse of standards represents part of the truth about ourselves as a nation in that it has often been evoked in order to legitimate elitism, racism, and privileges for the few" (190). One way to confront this truth so as to not maintain it is by using *Student's Right* to enact a democratic platform in which theorizations of student differences, incompetencies, and disadvantages become expressions of the contradictions of the struggle for success, acceptance, and competency as measured through schooling. By bringing the resolution into the space that it is meant to occupy—the classroom—we can work to enact a multilingual policy that respects, upholds, and legitimizes every person's right to his or her own language while affording him or her access to "multiple aspects of the communication process [whereby] we can be sure we are dealing with the totality of language, not merely with the superficial features of 'polite usage'" (*Students' Right* 12).

Contemporary conversations about and practices of language variation stem from the promise set forth in *Students' Right* that says that teachers "must

decide what elements of our discipline are really important to us, whether we want to share with our students the richness of all varieties of language, [and] encourage linguistic virtuosity” (2). It is essential that we, as a profession, privilege the language rights of our students by exposing them to the multiplicity and creativity inherent in expressive forms of literacy. This means that educators should rethink the implications of the resolution in ways that parallel the justice of our classroom pedagogy with the legacy of the resolution. We must do more than theorize about student differences and language variation. We must use a rights rhetoric such as *Students’ Right* to encourage students to become active learners and critical thinkers inside and outside of classrooms if we are, in the words of Smitherman, “taking care of business” (*Talkin and Testifyin* 216). Clearly, we can engage in complex discussions of language in composition courses in ways that pay attention to the *Students’ Right* resolution, Jordan’s argument regarding our common currency, hooks’s attention to the language of class, Nino’s interpretive attitude, and Smitherman’s analysis of language rights if we are ever to repudiate the inequities of social class, language abuse, and racism. Let us affirm the rights of students to their own language by affirming the practices they bring into classrooms as they enhance their critical thinking, reading, writing, and performing skills.

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Notes

1. Examples of events that occurred during this time include Truman’s Executive Order 9981 Establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Forces, signed in 1948; the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, 1954; the Civil Rights Acts, 1957 and 1964; the Voting Rights Act, 1965; the launch of the Poor People’s Campaign, 1967; and the *Students’ Right* resolution, 1972 and 1974. All such events hold important places in the discussion of a rhetoric of rights as articulated by Jordan, Smitherman, Villanueva, and the CCCC Executive Committee of 1972.

2. In *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students’ Right to Their Own Language*

(published by NCTE, 2000), Stephen Parks discusses “how class politics, political alliances, and progressive social movements can enhance the foundation of composition studies” through “community-based critical pedagogy” (Scott and Kinloch 705). I believe it is significant to cite him in detail. In the introduction of the book, Parks writes: “My hope, however, is that a history of the SRTOL can serve as a tool in the general effort to establish an effective progressive response to current conservative politics, for the realities that mark the lives of the oppressed can gain political relevancy only through alliances committed to transforming the social terrain; that is, an informed student paper does not by necessity lead to political change. The future must be defined by collective action. Perhaps this history can remind us of that fact” (17). In his examination of class politics, collective action, social movements, and the history of both composition studies and the SRTOL movement, Parks does not “provide an exact model by which such a pedagogy can be directly implemented in classrooms, in communities, or in efforts at organization” (Scott and Kinloch 709). His “history” of composition studies and his call for a community-based critical pedagogy, in relation to the SRTOL movement, overlook the participatory involvement and collective action of African American scholars, an oversight worthy of critical examination.

3. I am concerned with what and how we communicate about language use, acceptance, and standardizations to our students (both speakers proficient only in EAE and speakers labeled “linguistically diverse”) and to our colleagues, particularly as we teach academic writing. This teaching, I believe, does not have to occur to the sole exclusion of languages and variances historically deemed “nonstandard” and “nontraditional.” This work, of integrating and promoting linguistic diversity in any classroom, is difficult; however, such work can prove useful in students’ understanding of the multiple facets of language, writing, communicating, and existing in this diverse, multilingual world.

4. In *Empowering Education*, Ira Shor writes of student participation and curricular negotiations: “The teacher leads and directs the curriculum, but does so democratically with the participation of the students, balancing the need for structure with the need for openness. The teacher brings the lesson plans [. . .] but negotiates the curriculum with the students and begins with their language, themes, and understandings” (16). However difficult it may be, I seek to embrace Shor’s assertion by advocating for students’ right to their own language and by encouraging student participation in my own classrooms.

5. Because this preliminary study of the historical and pedagogical significance of the SRTOL resolution examines classroom conversations and engagements with course readings, I do not offer substantive data from student writings as a way to demonstrate the “ultimate” effects of my pedagogical strategies. I will take up the challenge of demonstrating the effects of my strategies on student writings in a

future study.

6. My own reflections on this course are ongoing: in part, I seek to enhance my own methods of engaging students in the very complex issues highlighted throughout this article; in another way, I reconsider how my actual pedagogical practices speak to the difficulties of student writers on writing. While I attempt to illustrate methods and pedagogical practices throughout this article, I am aware that this article highlights students' thinking (talking, presenting, and engaging with the texts, with one another, and with the teacher) rather than their doing (the act of writing and the difficulties that may come with this process).

7. I recognize that my own positionality affects my abilities to work with the suggested strategies. The ways in which my students see and react to me—insofar as race, class, age, and academic status are concerned—are oftentimes inviting “of classroom environments supportive of imaginative explorations, freedom of idea expression and generation, and the journeys of the writing process” (Kinloch, “Poetry” 111). It does not, nonetheless, become easy to teach complex thematic issues, to ask students to discuss such issues openly and honestly in the classroom and, subsequently, to have students produce written, academic arguments.

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