



Chapter 11

A Textbook Case of Antiracism: Course Readings and Critical Pedagogy for Multilingual First-Year University Writers

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ABSTRACT

The pedagogic assumption that English is not only a target language for international students and other L2 English users, but also a metonym for the desirable culture to which they must assimilate is still prevalent in many Canadian institutions. This chapter discusses how two teacher-practitioners wrote a first-year writing (FYW) textbook for multilingual students, drawing on critical pedagogy to resist this form of white linguistic and epistemic supremacy while also empowering multilingual writers and resolving the vexed question of content in writing textbooks. In this chapter, the authors describe their fruitless search for a suitable textbook, their decision to write their own, their articulation of the principles that would guide their composing process, the frameworks they drew upon, and the secondary research that supported their choices as they created FYW learning materials that were antiracist and anti-linguicist but supportive of the academic success of multilingual students within the prevailing assessment ecologies in their institution.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we—Srividya (Vidya) Natarajan, a Writing program administrator and instructor, and Emily Pez, a Writing instructor¹—bring a practitioner focus to the issue of textbooks for multilingual international students who are taking first-year university Writing courses in Canada.² Our liberal arts college recruits international students from many countries, with by far the largest numbers coming from

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China, South Korea, and South Asia. As in many other Canadian post-secondary institutions, international students and students who have recently immigrated to Canada from non-English speaking nations are encouraged to take first-year Writing (FYW) courses designed specifically for multilingual writers.³

Like many teacher-practitioners who share a growing awareness of

- the extent to which Open Educational Resources (OERs) can mitigate financial hardship among students,
- critiques of commercially produced textbooks and associated pedagogic practices, especially on raciolinguistic grounds (Basabe, 2006; Bori, 2018; Gulliver & Thurrell, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2003a; Ndura, 2004; Pennycook, 2012), and
- the ways in which learning materials can be adapted and customized in the digital age (Atkinson & Corbitt, 2023; Mishan, 2022),

we embarked on the work of creating an FYW textbook for our own localized and specific purposes. What we learned in the process may be of interest to colleagues in the field.

Discussing the creation of learning materials, Spiro (2022) observed that “for the teacher the starting point is often a perceived need, and a gap in resources that meet this need” (p. 479). She recommended that practitioners who are creating learning materials learn their craft by engaging with materials scholarship, by trawling through existing textbooks, and, importantly for our chapter, by listening to each other. It is this impulse to share the “pedagogic reasoning” (Pang, 2016; Richards, 2015; Shulman, 1987) behind their textbook creation with a community of practitioners that animated Atkinson and Corbitt’s (2023) fascinating discourse analysis of their composing process, which elicits the relationship between their teaching praxis and their textbook choices. As humanities scholars, we offer the pedagogical reasoning behind our choices for an FYW textbook for multilingual writers partly as theorized narrative, which gathers together what Shulman called the “wisdom of practice” (1987, p. 11), and partly in the form of a theorized list of “principles,” enumerating what Shulman called “formal scholarship of education” (1987, p. 10).⁴

While many of these choices were intuitive at the time they were made (in 2018–2019), we have since been drawing on existing scholarship and research to interpret, reflect upon, and analyze them. While self-reflection for the purposes of pedagogic improvement has been ongoing since 2019, when we piloted our textbook in our classrooms, focused analysis occurred through Zoom meetings in the spring and summer of 2023. During these meetings, we discussed and took notes on:

- our teaching experiences
- our impressions of textbooks that we had encountered in our searches (and had revisited recently for this project)
- our reading of scholarship in a number of contiguous domains (including antiracist and decolonial pedagogy, linguistic ideology, second language writing, learner identity studies, learning materials creation, and so on).

Our secondary research helped us unpack and frame our notes, and helped us make our pedagogic reasoning explicit. It will also inform our plan for enrichment and enlargement of our textbook, which we hope to make available beyond its current in-house avatar, as an OER.

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