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Book Review: *Redesigning Composition for Multilingual Realities*

Discussed in this review:

Jordan, Jay. *Redesigning Composition for Multilingual Realities*. Urbana, IL: National Council for Teachers of English, 2012. Print.

Jay Jordan's *Redesigning Composition for Multilingual Realities* provides a thoughtful analysis of language learning and multilingualism and an argument for curricula informed by multilingual writers' expertise and experience. The publication arrives at an opportune moment: international student enrollments in US higher education reached an all-time high in 2012, the year of this book's publication ([Institute of International Education: Open Doors Data: International Students](#)). These international students joined numerous US citizens who speak, read, and write in languages other than English. While Jordan does provide curricular models and pedagogical approaches, the heart of this book is a call to shift our understanding of what it means to use English in the 21st century and to redesign composition teaching and curricula accordingly. Our work as 21st century instructors and administrators, Jordan argues, should prepare all students to write and learn in increasingly globalized contexts. This theory-based proposal echoes recent scholarly work on translingual approaches to addressing language difference in composition classrooms (Lu and Horner).

Jordan crafts his contribution to the conversation by drawing on theory from linguistics, second language writing, rhetoric, and composition, including well-known champions of

developmental writing Keith Gilyard and Lisa Delpit, to argue for "mov[ing] beyond efficient, conventionally acceptable texts into relationships and strategies that are essential to intercultural and linguistic negotiations" (87). This redesign of composition benefits students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, Jordan argues, while taking full advantage of the competencies they bring to the classroom. This move, in turn, creates conditions for multilingual students' practices and competencies to "infect" and enrich all course participants' understanding of language and writing in resulting communities of practice.

Drawing on his own teaching experience and a growing body of research on English language learners' writing competencies, Jordan argues for expanding "the scope of the act of composition" (87) and for adopting a language abilities concept commonly referred to as *communicative competence*. In Chapter 2, he re-reads a series of writing center interactions between native English-speaking tutors and multilingual tutees. In the sessions there are moments originally interpreted as failures in which Jordan finds evidence of hidden success by multilingual students who perform myriad negotiations as they navigate the tricky terrain of communicating in diverse languages and cultures. Jordan continues his discussion of competencies by identifying and naming the writing-related competencies English language learners bring to composition: "'Book' knowledge of English grammar, lexical and syntactic innovation, linguistic and/or rhetorical resistance/accommodation, cross-cultural information/critique, and meta-task orientation" (65).

In Chapter 3, Jordan explains how these competencies play out in an experimentally linked mainstream-multilingual composition course. Students enrolled in the two courses first meet briefly to get to know each other and then participate in online peer review of each other's

papers. Jordan provides excerpts from student communications to illustrate language competencies and examples of learning about language difference. This analysis provides the foundation for Jordan's subsequent proposal that US composition programs consider the potential value of intercultural communicative competencies, a set of practices identified by the Council of Europe to facilitate the interactions between people from multiple linguistic and cultural contexts (120). These competencies include knowledge of social groups, curiosity and willingness to learn, ability to identify cultural values, interpreting and comparing documents from multiple cultures, and the abilities to acquire new cultural knowledge and to adapt in real time (124). Jordan goes on to propose strategies for incorporating these competencies into composition: language awareness writing prompts, peer review scaffolding strategies, uses of real-world multimedia communication materials, and portfolio evaluation. Rather than prescribing a pedagogical program, Jordan calls for an approach that encourages discovery through teaching and research in multilingual interactions.

Jordan's proposal is promising but also problematic. There is no doubt that the definition of "conventionally acceptable texts" taught in composition classrooms continues to shift as academic writing moves into digital spaces and global contexts. Still, writing teachers may blanch at expanding the role of writing instruction beyond traditional print-based reading and writing practices. Fully addressing academic writing in the course of a single semester is already difficult without adding competencies that may be problematic to assess with traditional methods. Moreover, composition courses are frequently taught by graduate students and part-time instructors who may have little authority, access to professional development opportunities, or time to redesign courses. Gaining support from outside the writing program (where ideas still circulate about composition as a space to "fix" error and ameliorate language difference)

presents additional difficulties. Additionally, Jordan recognizes that developing interactive language competencies requires more than one semester of “multilingual interactions” and will ultimately require substantial institutional support and buy-in.

Works Cited

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