

5-13-2018

Translingual Work at a Local After-School Program

JC

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.uwm.edu/writingmke>

Recommended Citation

JC, "Translingual Work at a Local After-School Program" (2018). *Writing & Rhetoric MKE*. 45.
<https://dc.uwm.edu/writingmke/45>

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by UWM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Writing & Rhetoric MKE by an authorized administrator of UWM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunicationteam-group@uwm.edu.

Translingual Work at a Local After-School Program

5/13/2018

On April 12, 2018 and again on May 8th, 2018, I joined the Education Coordinator from Woodland Pattern Book Center at after school programming at Franklin Pierce Elementary School. Woodland Pattern Book Center is a local bookstore and literary arts nonprofit in the Riverwest neighborhood of Milwaukee. As is clear from [their website](#), Woodland Pattern focuses on working in the community through poetry readings—often bringing in renowned poets from around the world—and adult and children’s educational programming in the form of poetry camps, workshops, and after school programming. Along with after school programming at Franklin Pierce, Woodland Pattern also regularly does programming at Hopkins Lloyd Elementary School as well.



Franklin Pierce is one of the bilingual schools in the Milwaukee area, and one of a few in the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) system. According to [their website](#), “Pierce is a multi-ethnic, Title I school” that “serves approximately 450 bilingual and monolingual students.” A large portion of the bilingual students at Franklin Pierce are bussed in from the south side of Milwaukee, where a large community of Latinx residents reside (more information about that community can be found in the posts [“A Walk Through Walker’s Point”](#) and [“‘Expansive Threads’ at Latino Arts, Inc. and the Busy Nature of the United Community Center”](#)).



Woodland Pattern's afterschool programming at Franklin Pierce focuses on art and poetry. On the days that I visited, the Woodland Pattern team was working with 4th and 5th grade students on writing haikus and making drums. The students wrote their own haikus and then built hand-sized drums using small pieces of wood and packing tape. In the building stage, students were able to paint their drums using the haiku that they wrote as inspiration. Then, on top of their art work, they wrote the words of their haikus. Finally, once the drum was complete students would practice singing or saying their haiku while also providing a drum beat.

Students at Pierce were often users of either African American Vernacular English or a form of Spanish, so it was refreshing to see the Woodland Pattern staff encourage all students to work and write in their own preferred languages, whatever they may be. It helped to make clear what the work of translanguaging has theorized. Of the Spanish-speaking students, many wrote variations of haikus that were entirely in Spanish while others mixed both Spanish and English to create haikus that were uniquely theirs. It was absolutely refreshing to see these children so engaged with work that encouraged the use of their languages, because, as some of the staff explained, the point is not to get them to speak a specific language, but to think about who they are as individuals and how they can contribute to their communities.

Additionally, because some students were still learning English, I was able to see some translanguaging in action. Some of the staff members at Woodland Pattern are familiar with Spanish, but none of them are fluent. As such, I was able to see the ways in which both teachers and students make use of props or drawing or even bodily signs to make clear their meaning when the words that each person has are not the same. Students who were learning the language showed a remarkable rhetorical adeptness at working through these issues with teachers. It, of course, made me think about reading Rachel Bloom Pojar's book *Translanguaging Outside the Academy: Negotiating Rhetoric and Healthcare in the Spanish Caribbean* earlier this semester. My time with these students helped me to see the ways that this work is important beyond the walls and ivory towers of our academic strongholds, and pushed me to think about how we can continue to break down those false oppositions between academia and the larger community.

--JC