

THE MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM



A classroom that makes room for students' experiences can also make room for their first languages. Such a classroom may be one where students feel comfortable working together on coursework in their own language. For the most part, the focus of OCAD classes is on mastery of content, not language practice, and for ESL students, discussion in their own language may at times be the best way to solidify their learning. But students' first languages can be more than just a way to communicate with each other. Encouraging multilingual students to draw on their first language for their creative work can lead to fascinating, multilayered work (as in the examples on these pages).

FACULTY STORY



In 2006, there were four students in the Integrated Media Thesis class who made work in film and video that ran “against the grain” of English.

Maxine Bergevin decided not to translate the poetic French text of her audio

installation, and instead wrote a parallel text in English which appeared on a screen positioned as a sheet of paper in a typewriter.

An anglophone had to take a running start to speak the title of Josée Lapierrière's video *J'viens pas du Québec ok?* about growing up francophone in Timmins, Ontario, and the elisions, erosions and complications of the unique, and disappearing French culture of northern Ontario. She resorted to subtitles at some points but refused them at others. Both of these students and their works took the issues of translation very deeply into consideration.

Yi-Ting and Lin-Yao each made films; though they were quite different in their styles, approaches, and intentions. (By coincidence, both have roots in Taiwan.) The spoken language in their films was Chinese, because although they made their work within an English-only environment, the primary audience of address for their films was not an English speaking audience. They used English subtitles.

In the making of a student film, faculty often read several drafts of a script. This process was complex for Lin Yao who wrote in Chinese (Mandarin). She would then have her script translated into English (by a friend, or friend of a friend). I would give feedback on that

draft, and she would take notes in Chinese. When we were dealing with more subtle issues of meaning and cinematic language she resorted to taping me so that she could think about the comments later. We fussed over the subtitles, deciding together what one would say in certain circumstances. Interestingly Lin-Yao's film had a fantastic plot about two women who become trapped in the same body and have to negotiate each others' lives.

Yi-Ting's film was quite different in approach, though the process was again one of collaborating through an unseen translator. Her piece was initially called *My Mother* – but the Thesis class collectively retitled it: *Media, Memories, My Mother and Me*. Her difficulties were of the limits of self-expression, and of the loss of sound and nuance in the language of her mother(s) tongue.

Johanna Householder, Art

STUDENT STORY



We did a fabulous project when our instructor taught us typography in the first semester. He assigned us to do a long copy ad. But if our first language was not English we

could use our own language to do the ad. I was stunned to have a professor who had the courage to propose this assignment in a typography class.

It was frustrating in a way to come up with a long body copy that tells a convincing story; and in a way it was more frustrating to write it in my own language (Chinese) and have my professor understand it. If I were to choose to write in my own language, then I also had to bring a certain foreign culture to describe my client (Dove) to non Chinese-speaking Canadians. On the other hand, it was a good opportunity to bring my culture to the class. And if writing it in a foreign language could make my ad stand out from all the other ones, why not? In the end I wrote my story in Chinese with English translation on the ad. That was an alternative method to wrap up this long copy ad.

I was thankful that he created this assignment because he showed his interest in other countries and tried to bring it to the class to create a true “multicultural” class environment when half of the class was made up of international students. That means so much to ESL students because that means Canadians actually appreciate our culture and our existence in Canadian society.

Miranda Chung, Advertising