

What can Australian classrooms learn from Ubuntu translanguaging? Enhancing epistemic access for multilingual students.

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As multilingualism becomes more the norm than the exception in Australian classrooms, naturally occurring instances of translanguaging and situated, fluid language use amongst students sit strikingly at odds with our monolingual-centric school curriculum. Teaching and assessment practices that are conducted solely through Standard Australian English not only fail to recognise the linguistic resources that multilingual students bring to their learning, but also privilege specific ways of knowing and epistemic biases. Researchers and educators who recognise the ways in which this contradiction can lead to educational disadvantage for multilingual students have called for the development of pedagogies that capitalise on students' multiple language resources, offering a more inclusive and expansive approach to learning. Such approaches require teachers to become more responsive and empathetic to the varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds and needs of their learners, many of whom have to learn English while simultaneously having to learn substantial classroom content. Accounting comprehensively for these needs requires a deeply humanistic approach to teaching. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, which encapsulates the ethos "I am because we are" (Makalela, 2016) provides an apt framework for this type of teaching, which foregrounds the accommodation of other cultures and the recognition of a collective humanity. In this paper, I present classroom data that illustrates how facilitating multilingual students' translanguaging within an Ubuntu philosophical approach can deepen their comprehension through enabling their epistemic access, while simultaneously strengthening their identity development as members of a learning community.