

Linda Christensen

“Teaching Standard English: Whose Standard?”

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Summary

- Published in an English journal, “Teaching Standard English: Whose Standard?”, Linda M. Christensen offers possible solutions to struggles faced by both students and teachers in order to promote acceptance of diverse languages and approach new writing techniques.
- Christensen begins by recalling the negative impact her ninth grade English teacher
- “Mrs Delaney” had on her life. She moves on to claim that most English teachers judge and humiliate their students for not knowing how to write, and in the end train them to be “language cops”.
- Christensen offers many examples from her early life to support her claim that teaching students Standard English in a way that devalues their own language is a problem.
- Christensen ends by summing up her entire text into one sentence which says, it’s more important what you have to say not how you say it.

Rhetorical Context

Purpose: To address individual struggles faced by students, when asked to write in an orthodox way, it portrays how teachers should accept students diverse backgrounds when communicating.

Audience: English teachers, professors, and students.

Genre: Academic Article from The English Journal

Angle Of Vision

- View points: third person or holistic view points
 - Removes herself from giving advice to teachers and students and focuses on helping both sides.
 - Examples: “One way to encourage reluctant writers who have been silent... is to encourage them to recount their own experiences”
- Emphasis: on education and educators
 - She keeps her focus of the journal on providing techniques to educators to help students learn to write better

Appeals To Ethos

To convince her audience to agree on her stance about diversity of language, Christensen appeals to ethos and establishes her credibility and trustworthiness in matters concerning the issue by stating her occupation. In the journal, she states her 15 years of experience as an english teacher who had have to deal with problems like the one she thinks needs immediate checks. This creates;

1. A notion for her audience to realize that as an english teacher who has been teaching for 15 years it is necessary that society pays attention to her stated problem.
2. A convincing mentality that the problem needs a new way of approaching which she suggests in other paragraphs.

Appeals To Logos

- Flashback memories of authors own personal experiences
 - “Over the years my English teachers pointed out all of my errors, the usage errors I inherited from my mother’s Brandon, Oregon, dialect, the spelling errors i overlooked, the fancy words I used correctly.”
 - Used to support her claim that writers can work through their challenges to accept their diverse background and communicate through new approaches.

Shifts in tone- from her own personal experiences to those experiences of her students

- Ex: Shared Fred’s writing, showed that the biggest problem was that he made no mistakes
 - This demonstrated his “discomfort with writing”
 - Used as evidence that students need to know where to find help, understand that changes are necessary, but their voice as a writer should still be present.

Appeals To Pathos

- Linda appeals to pathos by connecting to students, especially those who have been embarrassed in class because of their accent. She starts off the article by recalling a time in ninth grade where her teacher made her feel inferior to her classmate, she wrote “She asked Helen Draper, whose father owned several clothing stores in town, to stand and say “lawyer.” Then she asked me, whose father owned a bar, to stand and say “lawyer.” Everyone burst into laughter at my pronunciation.”
- She connects to teachers and educators when she talks about how to actually help students and not just correct them. She points out how some teachers will just tell you what you said was wrong and how this habit will keep some students down. She goes on to explain to teachers when and how to correct.

Reading With The Grain

- After reading the text I have determined that I can't relate to Christensen's experiences, but I can sympathize and understand where she is coming from
- I have heard about teachers like "Mrs Delaney", therefore I understand the frustration even though I have never felt it when it comes to English.
 - Ex: I had a math teacher who only allowed the class to solve problems using her methods. Even though I learned an alternate way of learning to factor that gave me the correct answer, she didn't allow me to use it.
- In this way I understand how it feels to be limited in a class by the teacher. It's important for students to be innovative and create or discover new ways of doing something.
- Christensen says, "we need to equip them to question an educational system that devalues their lives and their knowledge".
- I believe that just because a student sees or does something differently, it doesn't mean they are wrong.

Reading Against The Grain

- When Linda argues her point she generalizes students.
- She assumes that students that grew up with a different home language or dialect are going to have problems with standard english.
 - I don't find this to be true, plenty of spanish speakers I know speak perfect standard english.
 - She also assumes that students who fail due to language errors internalize blame and ultimately end up feeling inferior because they did not succeed.
 - She says "If they get poor SAT scores, low grades on term papers or essays because of language errors, fail teacher entrance exams, they will internalize the blame; they will believe they did not succeed because they are inferior instead of questioning the standards of measurement and those making the standards."
 - This is not always the case, there are people who see their failure and use it as inspiration to do better.

Works Cited

- Christensen, Linda M. “Teaching Standard English: Whose Standard?”
The English Journal, vol. 79, no. 2, 1990, p. 36.