



Journal of Basic Writing

A Developmental Writing Experiment: Mixing ELL and NES
Student Writers

Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner and Jed Shahar

Binary Structures in a Translingual Age: Investigating
Community College Writing Placement to Support
Linguistic Diversity

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Curricular Choice

Becky L. Caouette

Designing Rubrics to Foster Students' Diverse Language
Backgrounds

Amanda Athon

Spring
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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 20-30 pages, double spaced, on topics related to basic and ESL writing, broadly interpreted. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines. Manuscripts are refereed anonymously. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and e-mail addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of about 150 words, and a list of four to five key words. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for including excerpts from student writing, especially as it entails IRB review (which should be noted in an endnote).

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: Hope.Parisi@kbcc.cuny.edu, and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in eight to ten weeks.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing or second-language theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing; social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory; grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with such fields as psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. The journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of new literacies, translingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics and online and social-media impacts as per intersectional writing identity formations.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, and critiques the institutions and contexts that place students in basic writing and standardize academic language, as much as it may illumine the subtexts of individuals' writing practices. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population and settings which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a variety of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research written in non-technical language; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy. A familiarity with the journal is the best way to determine whether JBW is your next venue for scholarship.

EDITORS' COLUMN

Recent studies of the disparate impacts of writing placements for students designated as in need or underprepared, at both two- and four-year colleges, are revealing an underside of placement-driven remedial education in new ways. There are long-term impacts: students who don't complete remedial programs or whose progress is delayed; lower retention rates; unsuccessful transfer. For populations whose languages and English varieties are excluded or devalued in the writing classroom, the disparate impacts play havoc with the stated social justice missions of many open access institutions.

Pictures showing the long-term impacts of these programs, which do not take account of the support and attention we provide in our classrooms, should challenge us. They should also wake us to the fact that our classrooms, however supportive, may be unique experiences amid a wave of obstacles that students must navigate to meet the promises of education in today's America. The articles of this issue all recognize the same sobering reality: that the supportive, responsive pedagogies of our classroom do not stand on their own. This fact is especially relevant for the students our authors focus on—students of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Placed into programs that are yet to “reimagine the meaning of ‘college readiness’ in ways that advance student agency” and “fairness” (Poe, Elliot, and Norbert 2019), these are the students most likely to bear unintended harms in a range of placements.

In our first article, “A Developmental Writing Experiment: Mixing ELL and NES Student Writers,” Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner and Jed Shahar challenge the designations for writing students, in particular those designations between English Language Learners and Native English Speakers. As faculty at a large urban community college, Comeau-Kirschner and Shahar experienced the separation of students, all highly diverse, into “nonnative” or “native”-speaking classrooms as questionable. During a summer intervention, student groups were reconfigured to learn in mixed-group settings, utilizing themes and practices around translingualism, gateway course materials, and supplemental instruction. While the program's previous run-throughs showed NES students faring better than ELLs on exit measures, students labelled ELL had a higher median improvement than did their NES counterparts, with both groups demonstrating “improv[ement] at a relatively equal pace.” The intervention fostered broader linguistic experiences alongside writing success, proving the value of translingual ethos and practices. It was also effective in encouraging long-range reform: the

English department has since added regular conversation hours to its writing center offerings, and two departments, one for English and one for reading and writing support, have merged. As the authors note, work of this type adds support for ALP programs that similarly elide stigmatizing distinctions of many kinds, and questions “the point of keeping remediation separate from English.” (The authors’ institution, City University of New York, has since eliminated the standardized measure as sole criteria for remedial exits.)

In our second article, “Binary Structures in a Translingual Age: Investigating Community College Writing Placement to Support Linguistic Diversity,” Jennifer Maloy uses a translingual context for arguing the need to reform placement practices to reflect and support the linguistic diversity of community college students. In line with Comeau-Kirschner and Shahar’s mixed-group intervention for ELL and NES populations, Maloy reveals the weave of ELL and NES backgrounds that flow through all the ESL and NES lower and upper level courses at her institution. Maloy reminds readers that, while seen as key for tracking students, the typical attributes of language background (for example, language spoken at home and time since arriving in the United States) do not always reflect how “the lived experiences of individuals influence the ways in which they use English(es), and the ways in which all students are learning—and creating—the relationship they have to academic discourse in English.” Courses dividing language learners from one another according to categories of linguistic competence actually become blocked pathways, circumventing support. Since all groups of language learners in her setting were “mixed” groups, all students were subject to “static linguistic identit[ies]” and experiences. A familiar picture emerges—of categories and structures working against our pedagogies. As Maloy observes, “From a translingual perspective, any isolation of a particular group of students based on language practices would need to be investigated in order to understand whether such positioning of students is based on assumptions about language and use of English(es) more than on established needs of students.”

In our third article, “Directed Self-Placement, Corequisite Models, and Curricular Choice,” Becky L. Caouette troubles the drive toward categories in writing placement by elaborating the ways a new directed self-placement structure positively impacted sequence, curriculum, and culture for writing at her institution. As a new “plus” version of the first-year writing course and DSP arose simultaneously, Caouette as WPA was in a prime position to help shape an array of course offerings from which students could freely choose. Welcome surprises surfaced: some students chose FYW 010, College Writing

Strategies, the college's four-hour weekly non-credited course, while others chose FYW100, first-year English, in its plus version. While students could speedily satisfy the writing requirement by way of one four-credit course, students had the option to take more time: a two semester sequence of FYW 010 and FYW 100, or FYW010 and FYW100Plus. Even Honors students had the option of slowing down. The effect was to give real form and meaning to student agency. In the process, Basic Writing, in the guise of FYW010, was destigmatized: inside the classroom, students retained their agency, having chosen the placement, as in the case of the FYW100Plus option. Programmatically, administrators, instructors, and advisors/counselors saw their role(s) stretched beyond that of spokesperson for policy and standards. And during the time of advisement and decision-making, DSP engendered conversations about writing that put students at the center. Today, as the program evolves, Caouette writes, "Students, faculty, and staff are talking about writing at Orientation—about the FYW courses, about student preparedness, and about what it means to write" at her institution. Caouette grasps that change linked to agency links directly to "fairness" and other aspects of social justice. She adds, "Like those who have instituted corequisites, I appreciate the opportunity to disrupt the easy sorting of students into binaries (BW or mainstream) and prefer, instead, to have a conversation with them. In addition, all instructors in the FYW Program are now part of the DSP process."

Finally, in our fourth article, "Designing Rubrics to Foster Students' Diverse Language Backgrounds," Amanda Athon highlights "classroom artifacts," in this case her institution's rubric for evaluating student writing, for their ability to "shape the way that students think about writing," communicate value, and establish priorities for writing across settings. In this context, rubrics metaphorically and materially constitute the boundaries of writing, giving way to the categories by which students writers are defined. In her study of the impact of rubrics on two sections of first-year writers, Athon surveyed students' attitudes on writing prior to their engaging the rubric; students used words like "creativity" and "ideas" to capture the core of writing. When surveyed again, their writing fit to the rubric's measures, students "learned to view good writing in terms of what was assessed and only what was assessed." Since it "overvalu[ed] mechanics and sentence-level issues," the rubric effectively "muted differences in language variation likely to function as assets." Thus the rubric erased differences and diversities among students while elevating standards and structure. Not least, the rubric presented a highly inaccurate view of writing, "as either correct or incorrect" and "focus[ed] on what not to do rather than what to do." Alternatively,

Athon shares the “Community Rubric” of University of Southern Florida, which values language diversity and writers’ agency and accounts for the development of writing over time.

It is the nature of teaching in Basic Writing to understand our work in terms of connections that always seem to “go beyond”—beyond individual teacher-agency or time-limited resources. The limitations, we must recognize, may include the classroom as well. This issue of *JBW* prompts us to grasp the limiting aspects of many structures we live and work within, their potential to cause unintended harms. Fortunately, each article presented here offers new directions for getting past limiting categories, enabling student agency, and, we hope, seeing Basic Writing closer to a new decade.

--**Hope Parisi** and **Cheryl C. Smith**

Work Cited

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A Developmental Writing Experiment: Mixing ELL and NES Student Writers

Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner and Jed Shahar

ABSTRACT: This collaborative writing intervention in one CUNY community college examined the effectiveness of mixing English language learners (ELLs) and native English speakers (NES) in advanced-level developmental writing courses. We describe the translingual approach to curriculum and intervention along with promising developmental education practices. We also combine reflections on collaboration and student outcomes with quantitative analysis to allow each of these tools to inform the other, as well as to consider the limits of single-measure analysis of students and programs. The mixing of ELLs and NES fostered a less segregated classroom with student work and language development progressing more than in non-mixed classes. A statistical analysis confirmed these impressions, which suggests a relatively predictable outcome for this intervention. The experiment influenced several changes in departmental and instructor practices.

KEYWORDS: accelerated learning program; developmental writing; English language learners; supplemental instruction; translingual approach

As the student population continues to shift in two-year colleges, it has become increasingly important for composition instruction to move toward a translingual approach that views language differences as resources for creating meaning rather than as an interference or hindrance (Horner et al.). In fact, most composition classrooms have evolved into places where “the categories have blurred and it is not uncommon for ESL, second dialect, generation 1.5, and native English-speaking students to work side by side” (Maloy 54). Even with those blurred categories, the shared goal of academic literacy for ESL specialists, basic writing practitioners, and those focusing on composition studies remains paramount. At the program level, Elena

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Lawrick has advocated for full integration of writing pedagogies, assessment practices, and teacher training (51) while Steven Accardi and Bethany Davila have advocated for mixed English Language Learners (ELL) and Native English Speaking (NES) composition classrooms that celebrate differences with blended pedagogies that can offer the most benefits for both students and instructors (57).

As instructors who regularly teach advanced-level developmental writing courses with those increasingly blurred categories, we have observed how difficult it can be for our own diverse student population to progress through, and ultimately, exit remediation, specifically ELLs who were exiting remediation at about half the rate as NES. Thus, we wanted to address two major college and departmental concerns as we designed an intervention to improve student learning outcomes. Specifically, we were aware of how easily students in ESL classes fall into linguistic cliques within and outside of the classroom, and we have struggled to integrate students with their classmates and the larger college community via our ESL classes. Given students' limited opportunities to practice Englishes with peers from different linguistic backgrounds, we have often found the development of adequate linguistic skills for credit-bearing course work insufficient as judged by in-class work, as well as the more restrictive exit measure of the college, an all-or-nothing writing exam.

In this article, we describe and examine the effectiveness of a collaborative, experimental writing intervention that made use of multiple best practices and addressed those recurring issues for our developmental students. In short, we developed a writing intervention that not only mixed NES and ESL classes, but also included supplemental instruction, as an alternative means of exposing students to a broader linguistic environment both within and outside of the classroom. In addition, the classes used materials for a credit-bearing class, à la the ALP model, as a way of contextualizing the work within this broader linguistic environment.

In examining the effectiveness of the program, we reflected on differences observed between the mixed classes and non-mixed ESL classes that we have taught at other times. As a way of contextualizing these reflections, we also conducted a quantitative analysis. We considered a statistical mode of analysis to be useful as a single quantitative measure that determined whether these students advanced, and as such, has often been useful in arguing for programmatic changes. In addition, a careful statistical analysis, paired with our reflections, allows for deliberation on the nature of all-or-

nothing testing. Accordingly, while we measured how the experiment of mixing the populations affected pass rates and measure this outcome, we also paid close attention to the improvement we observed in student placement/exit scores and how those results compared with our own observations about the students' linguistic engagement and development. We also conducted a regression to measure if previous test scores, ELL status, and/or repeater status could be correlated with exit test results. Namely, we considered whether the mixing of ELLs and NES and the use of gateway course materials were changes that should be used on the programmatic level.

Below we describe the intervention in detail by highlighting how it differed from our standard departmental practices. Next, we report on the differences we observed from students in the sections, notably not just the more linguistically diverse interactions within groups during class time, but also across groups within and outside of class. The students were more engaged with each other, as well as with campus institutions, and in this way, seemed more prepared for the challenges of the credit-bearing English class. The statistical analysis confirms these impressions while also illustrating how the single-measure exit test can be a questionable measure of student progress and preparedness. Lastly, we discuss how our observations and data have contributed to programmatic changes since the experiment.

ELL and NES Differences in Two-Year Colleges

Studies have shown that there are differences not only between ELLs and NES, which manifest themselves in significantly distinct outcomes for both populations, but also significantly varied characteristics “*within* each ESL group” (Lawrick 29). For instance, Sally Renfro and Allison Armour-Garb found that ELLs had higher retention rates after four semesters, and for those ELLs who had higher language skills than other ELLs, they also had higher graduation and retention rates than NES. Yet those positive ELL outcomes belie a unique set of challenges facing that particular population. For instance, Shelley Staples and Randi Reppen have addressed the differences in the development of linguistic complexity in academic writing (17); Paul Kei Matsuda and Tony Silva have examined the cross-cultural issues that may present challenges to institutional integration and the learning environment (16); and Lyndall Nairn has discussed the variability in faculty responses to grammatical concerns for ELLs versus NES (4). These differences in outcomes, integration, and instructor sensitivities raise the question: is

it better for these students with significantly different strengths and weaknesses to address these concerns together or separately?

Yet research on the efficacy of mixing ELLs and NES in developmental writing courses in community colleges is more nascent (Burt). Jennifer Malia (29) examined how ELLs perform in mixed classrooms by surveying teachers of a mandatory writing course, but her study focused on students who are already in a credit-bearing class. Similarly, Detlev Stenild Larsen conducted a qualitative study in which students were interviewed in the hopes of better understanding how NES and ELLs in a developmental writing program experienced remediation. In Larsen's study, however, even though the populations had very similar curricula and program structure (slightly fewer students in ESL classes), the students were not in mixed classrooms (58). In one quantitatively oriented study, Darlene Rompogren does, in fact have a quantitative analysis of ELLs comparing them with those of NES (131). The results show ELLs do as well if not better than NES, but her analysis compares how NES and ELL populations do in English and reading courses after ELLs have completed their ESL program, not what their proficiency was after the mixed class itself.

In developing our own combined classroom, we relied partially on other published accounts about mixing such students (notably, these articles focused more on promising collaborative learning strategies rather than outcomes). The findings emanated primarily from basic writing courses in which students engaged in peer review, highly structured dyads, or group assignments. Wei Zhu found some success when ELLs and NES provided oral feedback during peer review (251), while Leslie Hall Bryan reported that the safety of small, mixed groups helped ELLs develop an important awareness of their own writing and the writing process, and they engaged in opportunities to "rehearse" writing modifications through those discussions (189). For dyads, Diana Dreyer noted that read-aloud exchanges of essay drafts, note-taking, and switching roles, provided rich language opportunities for ELLs and enhanced NES spoken and written communication too (11-12). Not least, Bruce Speck discussed the importance of varied ELL and NES groupings to promote constructive discussion along with requiring writing from each group member (55-56).

Other researchers have focused on incorporating culturally based thematic content and experiences into mixed classrooms. Among numerous cross-cultural writing projects and activities, Matsuda and Silva found that ELLs seemed to increase their confidence, audience awareness, and communicative ability after interacting with NES (20-22). Similarly, D.

Michael Keleher reported that many of the ELLs and NES believed peer-to-peer interaction during group work helped to improve their writing and enhanced their cultural appreciation in their collaborative developmental writing course (9-11). Lastly, Nizar Ibrahim and Susan Penfield found that “the effect of interaction added substance and interest to virtually all writing assignments” (223) in their mixed ELL-NES grouping.

While qualitative research and the promising practices literature offer intriguing insights into the mixing of ELLs and NES in developmental writing courses, our experiment offers an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of these practices. First, it allowed us to observe how students may have changed their linguistic behaviors and development. In addition, the experiment lent itself to a quantitative analysis of how these changes affected outcomes for the students in terms of advancement out of remediation. As this advancement was determined by a single measure, our study allows for reflection on the limits of single-measure exit practices through both observation and statistics.

Student and Institutional Background

Before describing the details of the intervention, we want to describe the student population at Queensborough Community College (QCC), as well as how remediation works at the school. Queens, New York is one of the most culturally diverse counties in the nation (Queens: Economic Development and the State of the Borough Economy, 2006), and QCC attracts a varied NES and ELL population. For instance, more than 40 percent of students claim to speak a language other than English at home; 24 percent are African-American, 27 percent Hispanic, and 26 percent Asian (Fact Book 2012-2013). Partially due to students’ diverse cultural and educational experiences, as much as 70 percent of incoming freshmen have scored below proficiency on their entrance exams, which designates them as needing remediation in reading, writing, and/or mathematics (Fact Book 2012-2013).

When students require writing remediation at QCC, they are required to take intermediate- or advanced-level remedial writing courses within the English Department. If NES were born in the United States or have been in this country for most of their lives, they are placed in a class with other NES. ELLs who have recently emigrated from other countries and/or have limited English language skills are assigned to courses taught by instructors who specialize in second language acquisition and English for Academic Purposes, and these classes only have ELLs¹.

Our students' varied linguistic and educational backgrounds can present advantages and challenges for the department and the college. For instance, departmental data shows that students classified as ELL pass the writing exit exam at nearly half the rate as their NES counterparts. Yet ELLs sometimes outperform their NES counterparts in other areas, such as persistence and retention. In addition, the varied backgrounds allow there to be a worldwide range of experiences and approaches to the classes.

We had both taught separately tracked courses for more than three years at QCC before this experiment, and we had often shared thoughts about how we might be able to increase meaningful interactions between our ELL and NES students. We both observed how, even with the linguistic diversity available at the college, students in ESL classes often broke themselves up into groups inside and outside of class along native-language lines and very often communicated with each other in that native language inside and outside of the class. Even if student group composition for in-class group work was determined by the instructors, students would find ways to avoid English practice by conversing with the one member of the group who shared their native language, work across groups during class time, and/or work within their linguistic community outside of class.

While we both understood this desire to work with native-language peers as part of the development of proficiency with a non-native language, it is tricky in numerous ways, not the least of which is how much language and identity are closely linked. We acknowledged this to our students as we often explained why we felt it was so important to work inside and outside of class in English as much as possible, and while almost all our students would nod their heads during these explanations, agreeing that yes, developing English language skills would be necessary for success in credit-bearing classes, informal conversations with many students would often reveal almost no English practice outside of the classroom. Many would note the lack of opportunity of speaking English as a partial cause for their limited practice, stating that in their homes, neighborhoods, and communities, there were very few people who spoke English. We also observed that these ELLs were generally quite diligent in doing the work assigned to them. They would make significant progress as readers and writers in our class, and while not all of them seemed ready for credit-bearing English 101, many who did seem ready were not able to take the credit-bearing English class because of the university's all-or-nothing exit exam. This frustrated the students and kept them more linguistically isolated, as they would have to stay in ESL classes or workshops until they could pass the exam.

In the NES classes, the concerns and outcomes were different than in ESL classes. Students generally did not work as hard, but they mostly did not struggle to find other speakers of English to converse with inside and outside of class (it is not rare that an ELL finds his/her way into NES classes, or that a NES is still in a community that does not have many English speakers). The all-or-nothing exit exam seemed to present less of a challenge for the NES with pass rates at times twice as high as in comparable ESL classes. Still, NES classes were often difficult to teach, and part of the blame could be laid on the test. Students often rejected and resented the remedial label, limiting participation and engagement. As this was before the more widespread use of ALP, which contextualizes the remedial work with a concurrent credit-bearing curriculum (although we did in fact do this by using 101 materials for this experimental class, see below), helping students to find a reason to work besides passing the exit exam was a challenge.

With these problems in mind, we wondered if it might make sense to mix upper-level ELL and NES remedial sections. The ELL cohort would have more opportunities to work with English speakers in the class. Group work in class can often lead to conversations and friendships outside of class, which of course can lead to a larger and more linguistically diverse social network for the ELLs. In addition, we thought the “expert” status the NES would hold with their ELL cohort could help them overcome any negative self-image impressions that may have arisen from the remedial label, while also investing them with some other purpose in the class besides passing an exit test. As well, we thought an in-class tutor from the department’s learning center would help provide another English speaker for the ELL cohort, and being one from a campus learning center, the tutor could provide an intermediate gateway to other parts of the college community (that is, as opposed to the professor or students).

It so happened that initiatives to bolster course and/or curricular innovation were offered during the summer session sections as an opportunity to experiment with the upper-level remedial curriculum and class structure. Thus, we decided in our experiment that we would mix one upper-level NES remedial writing section with one upper-level ELL remedial writing section during a summer session. On the first day of class, Cheryl’s ELL section came to Jed’s NES section classroom. We explained to the students that we were mixing the classes, so that each would have about as many ELLs and NES as the other. We also told the students that we would be teaching the same material to each class, so it wasn’t as if one class would be different or more difficult from the other, except by way of the difference in instructor. The

rosters were split at random, and Cheryl returned to her class with her NES cohort, leaving some ELLs with Jed.

In the end, both sections contained a total of 34 students who ultimately finished the class and took the exit exam, of those 22 were ELLs and 12 were NES. Fifteen students were repeating the advanced-level class, and 19 students were taking the class for the first time. All but a handful of students had previously taken developmental courses within the English Department (at that time Basic Education Skills Department). Some were repeaters and others had advanced from intermediate-level classes. During program recruitment, advisors had informed students that they would not need to pay tuition for the class, and in this way, students who may not represent the highly-motivated cohort often found in summer program were also included in the intervention; that is, the summer student population that generally has to pay for its own classes, and often do so for acceleration or completion purposes, were likely not the only students participating in it. Perhaps confirming this, a measure of student retention, unofficial withdrawals, shows no statistically significant difference between the summer session cohort and spring/fall-semester cohort (13% for the summer intervention).

The classes for the five-week summer session intervention met for the same number of contact hours as the fall and spring semesters (60 hours); however, we met with the students in a compressed schedule, four times per week for three and one quarter hours a day.

Accelerated Learning and Promising Practices

As mentioned above, the intervention adapted the Accelerated Learning Program's (ALP) practice of presenting credit-bearing course material to developmental students, albeit without the traditional ALP's mixing of developmental students with non-developmental students or the possibility of the accompanying credits. Nevertheless, the material offered our students the opportunity for a more contextualized learning experience as described in the ensuing sections. To this end, we used as a text one of the more popular 101 texts used on our campus, *Patterns of Exposition* by Robert Schwegler.

In an overview of recent research done on ALP models, Shanna Jagars, Nikki Edgecombe, and Georgia Stacey have shown that within the City University of New York (CUNY) and outside of CUNY there is a statistically significant difference in completed credits for those students within the program compared to those not in the ALP. Exactly why ALP students have had this positive outcome is not clear as students who succeed in the ALP

are consequently earning credits for a class that non-ALP students, even successful ones, may or may not end up registering for. While our intervention did not include the possibility of gateway-course credits (i.e. English 101), it did, however, contextualize the developmental work students are doing by exposing students to gateway-course materials, which is another possible source of the ALP's positive outcomes.

Supplemental Instruction. Given the difficulty of the course material and the desire for ELLs to practice English more, we felt that supplemental instruction (SI) would also be essential for the compressed time frame of the summer intervention. Joakim Malm, Leif Bryngfors, and Lise-Lotte Mörner found that developmental students benefitted from SI with regard to improved grades and reduced failure rates in high-risk courses (282), and Vincent Tinto notes that it enhanced retention in community colleges (61). Arendale also points out the use of “selected collaborative learning and study strategies” (21), along with sustained feedback about the comprehension of course material, helps students to better adapt their study behaviors to meet academic requirements and prepare for major examinations (22). In a similar vein, our SI tutors quickly identified necessary skills for course completion and sustained the learning process initiated during class time into their review sessions afterward. Again, the tutors provided an additional English interlocutor for ELLs and another way to integrate students into the more linguistically diverse college community.

Course Pedagogy. Our overall aims for the mixing of ELLs and NES largely aligned with a translingual approach to composition pedagogy. Horner et. al aptly posited that it is an approach that can serve “to develop and broaden the repertoire of students’ linguistic resources and to honor the resources of all language users” (308). For us, honoring the resources of all language users required a shift in our thinking about the blurred categories present in our classrooms; ultimately, those students’ language differences were not “interference” in our pursuit to instill the norms of standard written English. Indeed, Melissa Lee’s assertion that when curriculum revision is informed by a translingual approach to composition pedagogy, instructors can embrace “hybridity and fluidity as norms of language acquisition, usage and development” (312). Following the tenets of translingualism, we attempted to design the curricular activities and assignments so that our students had opportunities to work in pairs and groups and to foster meaningful communicative interaction with each other as often as possible. Moreover, we wanted to include similar thematically based readings from different perspectives, so

that ELLs and NES with varied backgrounds and experiences would be able to compare and contrast ideas in new and challenging ways.

To give readers a sense of how the mixed classes were conducted, we here describe the reading and assignments for one of the four major readings we did (see Appendix for further description of the other assignments). Throughout the session, we planned to work on increasingly challenging assignments to promote students' critical thinking and inference skills. Perhaps the most abstract assignment was "Two Ways of Seeing a River" by Mark Twain. Due to the difficulty of the assignment, we decided to try a different teaching approach in which we took turns teaching each class, which was a decision largely based on our own instructional strengths. We switched classes with Cheryl focused on brainstorming and organizing students' ideas in relation to Twain's notion of how outlook and experience can alter one's perception, and Jed focused on producing the summary. After trading classes, we each taught the same lesson in our own classes.

This class switch occurred in the middle of the session, effectively reminding both classes that the cohort of potential colleagues with which they could discuss classwork was in fact not just their own class, but any student from either class. Recall, that on the first day of the semester, the classes were brought together and reconstituted. The students were doing the same assignments with the same readings, and thus, had a wider range of interlocutors than a typical class.

Within the classes, students were put into mixed ELL-NES groups for brainstorming and summary writing assignments. Each group was asked to present their ideas and summaries to the class, with each member of the group required to present the work to the class in some way orally. For outlining and peer review assignments, students were paired off, an ELL with NES whenever possible, and when not, an ELL with another ELL of a different linguistic background. As Twain's essay deals with how differing backgrounds and perspectives can affect the way something appears to its viewer, the multitude of cultural and linguistic backgrounds led to lively discussions and illustrations of Twain's point. These tasks were again designed so that students would be prompted to practice speaking and listening as much as possible, but also so that the differing backgrounds were shown to be enriching. Finally, the students worked on the essay for this assignment while in the Academic Literacy Learning Center (ALLC), the same place the SI tutor would work with them outside of class time. As the students worked in the ALLC, the tutors and instructors came around and discussed the essay with them.

Just as we did with the Twain assignment, we repeated group-switching and mixing to mirror content and provide actual movement among and between groups for all the readings and assignments. Even though the other major readings were not as abstract as Twain, our overall pedagogical approach still provided ample opportunities for ELLs and NES to share different perspectives and engage in thoughtful discussions. Such interactions seemed to bolster students' reading comprehension and their confidence in working on the corresponding essay assignments.

Reflections on the Mixed Classes

Both of us have experienced summer session classes as more intense versions of spring and fall semesters. When they go well, the momentum of the work and progress can make the classes fly along, but when the classes don't click, daily meetings for over three hours can be a drain for the students and the professors. Interestingly, these classes did not feel either especially positive or negative. The more regular, longer class meetings paired with a new curriculum and course structure did often make us feel drained. However, the students' progress and group engagement were palpable and encouraging, to the point that the results of the exit exam described in the section below (which were in fact significant improvements) seemed disappointing since we felt confident that the classes were progressing so well.

Not surprisingly, considering our focus on mixing ELLs and NES, we were greatly satisfied with the increase in English usage in the classroom for the ELLs. The group work and paired work required students to communicate in English, and the informal conversations between students during breaks, before class, and after class were also observed to be almost all in English. The ELLs seemed to feel comfortable discussing homework and readings with the NES. They also seemed comfortable talking to them about other topics like snacks, commuting, us, the tutors, and the weather. Although we were conscious of the lack of English opportunities for ELLs, we primarily considered it in academic terms, and were surprised at how much the effect of mixing the populations extended the English opportunities for the students beyond class time.

Similarly, we had figured it would be useful to have the quasi-peer, quasi-instructor in the person of an in-class tutor for the students to talk with. The tutors were in fact regularly used by both populations as interlocutors and purposefully. There were times when groups would seek the tutor out instead of one of us because they wanted to present their ideas or ques-

tions in a less formal way. Likewise, when we were engaged in working with students or groups and another group had their hands up, we would offer to have the tutor help, but we were often told they wanted to check their ideas on us (and not because they thought the tutors weren't trustworthy). This awareness of different English registers was very gratifying, and again surprising, to observe.

Another benefit we observed was the way both populations regularly sought the help of the tutors and each other outside of class time. Both of us had multiple experiences of visiting the learning center to check on the tutors, or to coordinate with its director, to find multiple students from both classes engaged in work with the tutors from the class, other tutors, classmates or students in the other section. This was considered a heartening development as we had observed that a small set of ELLs made use of the tutoring available on campus (though those that did, we observed, would do so intensively). Having the tutors in the classroom, along with the increased confidence in English-language skills, appeared to make the students more comfortable to extend their potential for English practice outside of the classroom.

Although the effects described above generally are described through the prism of ELL changes, they also reflect changes for NES. As stated earlier, engagement with NES in remedial classes can be a challenge. The increase in NES engagement in class time, as well as in before class, during breaks, and after class conversations, suggested a more engaged NES population. Their ELL peers engaged them as linguistic experts, and thus, reached the students in ways we had struggled to. The NES were also more regularly seen in the learning center, again suggesting greater engagement. Part of the increased engagement could likely be attributed to the challenging nature of the work in the class. We would often hear remarks such as, "We're trying to figure this one out, Professor," when we saw the students in the learning center or returning from breaks. The playful complaints about the challenging nature of the work were taken as further evidence of increased engagement and the value of contextualizing the remedial work for a group of learners who were invested in each other's success.

One student in particular seemed to exemplify the benefits of the mixed class. This student had struggled to pass the exit test for numerous semesters. Conversations with the student and previous instructors attributed earlier challenges in exiting to limited English skills, but the more recent challenges were not as easily explained. The student worked hard in class and had developed her English skills to the point that non-passing grades on the exit

exams would surprise her instructors. The student had grown frustrated but continued to work hard. She expressed some concern on the first day, when we mixed the classes, about the experiment. Within a week, the student was acting almost as a second tutor in the class, regularly checking in with other groups for clarification on readings or assignments and pushing classmates to stay with her and the tutor after class for extra work. Even through all this, with her confidence growing, the student regularly expressed anxiety about the all-or-nothing exam at the end of the semester. She ended up passing and continued to earn an A in English 101. Returning after the exit exam and her English 101 success, the student would reflect on how the class gave her confidence, but she would also refer to other students in the class, showing the community effects of the mixing lasted.

Data Analysis

As stated in the introduction, our article looks to examine the effectiveness of our experiment with both reflections on the mixed courses and a quantitative analysis. The above reflections are anecdotal, and we hope valuable in that way. However, the analysis in this section is used to contextualize those reflections, as well as to explore the value and meaningfulness of single-measure exit criteria for remediation.

In examining the effectiveness of the program quantitatively, we first focus on the department's ability to advance the students out of remediation and the students' improvement as measured by entrance and exit scores (as opposed to how well the students were prepared for credit-bearing academic work in courses like ENG 101). As such, one of the primary outcomes that we have examined is pass rate for the exit exam. While a number of researchers have doubted the reliability of placement tests as a measure of academic success (Scott-Clayton and Rodriguez 5), for years it has been these tests, and these tests alone, that has determined whether the students in our upper-level developmental writing course can advance to the gateway course. As such, the results of the exit exam are one way of contextualizing the above reflections on the mixed classes and considering the meaningfulness of the exit exam.

There are obviously other measures and variables that can be considered for inclusion in this analysis besides pass rates, as there are numerous sources for student progress (or lack of progress). In this analysis, three primary independent variables are considered: ELL/NES status, placement score, and repeater status. ELL/NES status is included as it is a major concern

in the study, but it also represents a variable that can be viewed from the programmatic level as an input for placement. Likewise, a student's score on the placement exam, or whether a student has repeated the class, can also be viewed as an input for placement. More challenging variables to control for on the programmatic input level are instructor (there may be great variance in instructor pass rates and/or availability²), reading materials, and assignment types. It is for this reason that we are primarily considered with the variables listed.

As a dependent variable, a focus on pass rate allows us to assess how effective the intervention is, but the intervention must also be examined within the larger context of the program's sequencing, advancement criteria, and cut-off scores for each level. If students need to only score one or two points higher to pass the exam, and do just that, the intervention's success would need qualification. Similarly, if students need to make significant improvement to pass the exam, and they do so, though not entirely, the intervention's seeming failure should be understood in the larger context of the program, perhaps suggesting the intervention is, in fact, useful as long as other changes in the program are implemented (e.g. different placement scores).

The question of how much progress a student made is easily answered for repeating students since a failing grade on the exit exam is what forced them to retake the class. That failing grade is thus the most reliable statistical indicator that we had available for the student's entering expertise. However, for students who advanced into the class, their placement scores (the placement test is the same test as the exit test) may not be reliable because of the progress students made in their lower-level classes. Standardized exit exams for lower-level classes do offer an opportunity for us to estimate the students' entering expertise.

In our developmental writing courses, the final exam is nearly identical to the CATW and is scored with the same rubric as the exit exam and graded by two faculty members. Students must score above a score of 50 to advance to the upper-level class. For lower-level writing classes, students far exceeding the cutoff may bypass the upper-level and take the exit exam that semester, making the intervention useless to them. Thus, because we do not have access to the students' lower-level final scores, the students' adjusted placement scores were estimated at approximately the mid points of the placement range for the upper-level classes: 52 for writing (placement range 50-55). However imperfect this estimation may seem, it should be kept in

Table 1. Summary Statistics of Students Overall and Broken Down into ELL and NES Populations.

Cohort		Place- ment Score	Adjusted Place- ment Score	Exit Score	Improve- ment (between Adjusted and Exit Score)
Experi- men- tal Popula- tion <i>34 Students Overall</i>	<i>Mean</i> <i>Median</i> <i>StanDev</i>	46.82 48 3.63	50.27 52 2.47	54.73 56 6.63	4.46 4 5.7
ELLS <i>22 Students</i>	<i>Mean</i> <i>Median</i> <i>StanDev</i>	46.95 48 3.46	50 50 2.83	54 56 6.66	4 6 5.51
NES <i>12 Students</i>	<i>Mean</i> <i>Median</i> <i>StanDev</i>	46.58 48 4.06	50.75 52 1.66	56 56.5 6.67	5.25 4.5 6.18

mind that it is examined in concert with the more specified most-recent scores for repeaters.

Results

Table 1 shows a summary of the statistics for the summer intervention in the writing classes. The table shows that there is not much difference between the ELL and NES populations in terms of placement score and adjusted placement score averages. However, for the NES population, the median score, that is the middle score of the population as they are listed from least to most, is a little higher. The median score is presented with the average score to give readers another sense of an “average” student as the mean (average) can be heavily influenced by extremely low scores. In terms of exit scores, the NES population has a slightly higher average score than the ELL population. Standard deviation data is provided to give readers another sense of how close the majority of scores were to the average score. A lower standard deviation suggests more “clustering” around the average score, while a high score suggests a wider range of performance for students

Although the sample size is significantly smaller for the summer intervention, overall exit-test data for the program were better than the department’s average for the previous semester and the overall pass rate for the previous three semesters (see Figure 1). One way of understanding whether these differences are meaningful or just a result of chance in statistics is to use a z-test. In a study that has two possible outcomes for a population (in this case pass or fail on the exit exam), a z-test considers the number of participants with one of the outcomes (in this case, passing) as well as the number of participants in each sample (in this case, the number of students taking the class each semester). The z-test produces a p-value, and that p-value represents how likely the difference between the populations is related to chance. Generally, if the z-test produces a result under .05, it can be said with some confidence that the difference between the populations is statistically significant, as more broadly the lower than .05 value means there is less than a 5% chance the difference in the populations is related to chance.

Z-tests on the data in Figure 1 confirm the statistical significance of the difference between ELL and NES results over the three semesters prior to the intervention ($p < .001$). This suggests the program’s set up before the intervention was not working as well for the ELL population as the NES population. These results line up with the frustration we and our students experience in ELL stand-alone classes, at least in terms of disappointing re-

sults. It is important to note that the improvement in the summer programs is almost entirely in the ELL population, with z-tests suggesting only a statistically significant difference between the ELL pass rates when comparing the intervention with previous results ($p < .03$), and not for overall pass rates. Although the number of students in summer intervention (21) is relatively small and much lower than that of the previous semester (~150), the result is still considered promising considering the low p.

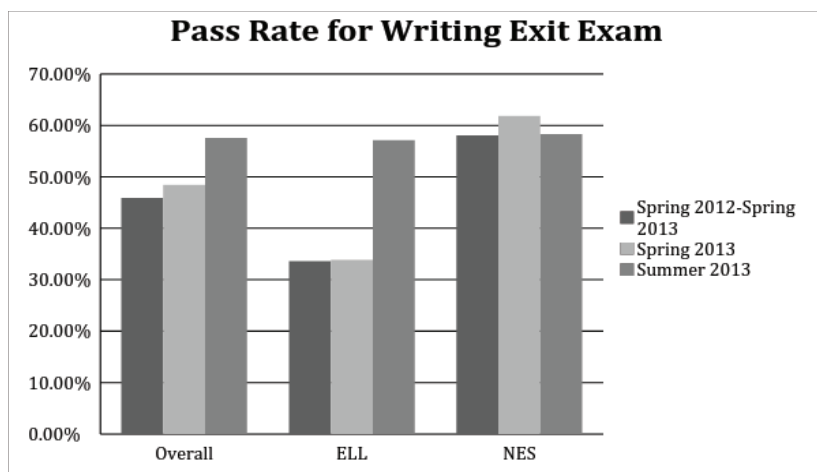


Figure 1. Pass rates for ELLs and NES on writing exit exam over three different time periods: the three previous semesters combined, the most recent semester, and the summer intervention.

When comparing the improvement of ELL and NES populations from an adjusted placement score to the exit exam, the average improvement for NES was higher, but the median improvement for ELLs was higher, while the standard deviations for improvement for both populations were similar (see Table 2). Using the same measures for repeaters and non-repeaters, it is observed that the mean and median improvement for the repeaters is higher. This difference is accompanied by a wider standard deviation for the repeaters. With no statistically significant differences found between the populations, these data, taken as a whole, suggest the intervention worked equally well for ELLs and NES, as well repeaters and non-repeaters. The parity in these measures of improvement suggests that the pass rate parity, the one observed only in the intervention, is not simply a result of students with higher entering scores only improving some. In fact, students in all cohorts seem to be improving at a relatively equal pace.

Table 2. Improvement Across Adjusted Entrance Exam and Writing Exit Exam for Cohorts of ELL, NES, Repeater, and Non-Repeater.

Cohort	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
ELL	4	6	5.51
NES	5.25	4.5	6.18
Repeater	4.93	5.5	6.8
Non-Repeater	4	4.11	4.91

Discussion

The increased engagement for both ELL and NES populations was both not surprising (that is, within class time) and surprising (outside of class), and since the classes seemed to make such progress with English 101 course materials, we expected (or hoped for) better results in terms of the exit exam. The results described above though do, in fact, suggest our impressions were accurate as there was a significant improvement for the ELLs. Furthermore, the data suggested meaningful improvement for all the cohorts we examined. That this improvement, coupled with English 101 course materials, was not enough for some students to exit remediation, we view as a partial indictment of the all-or-nothing exit exam for remediation. Additional analysis of the intervention reveals a relatively predictable outcome for the intervention in terms of improvement, and with this in mind, it is certainly the case that the results suggest that the placement scores for the upper-level remedial class might need reconsideration. However, we both saw a few students whom we thought were ready for English 101 work, who did not make it just because of the exit exam.

Two of the ELLs, in fact, had exit-test results that showed that the students had improved, but their scores were below the cut off for taking English 101, for one of the students by one point. Both of these students seemed to us ready for English 101 work and were engaged in practicing and improving their English, and instead of being allowed to pass the students,

we were forced to refer them to a 20-hour, test-prep workshop. The students both passed the workshop and earned B grades in English 101 in their first attempt taking the class. It would seem in light of these students' subsequent success that the additional resources used in getting these students to pass an exam would be unnecessary if the instructors had discretion over passing students. It is heartening to see the changes CUNY has adopted since this experiment with students in accelerated models not needing to take an all-or-nothing exit exam, and those in stand-alone classes having that exam be only part of the exit assessment.

This experiment prompted several changes in our teaching practices and helped contribute to larger departmental changes. For us, utilizing the translanguaging approach brought forth a number of new understandings and possibilities. Lee summarized the main principles of the approach in the following way: "Languages and boundaries between them are never fixed, the focus should be on intelligibility rather perceived fluency, the blending of languages is normal, all language involves translation" (316). When we mixed our ELLs and NES, those translanguaging tenets were brought to fruition due to the productive student interactions and the meaning-making that they engaged in with each other, with us, and with the supplemental instruction tutors. Based on those beneficial learning outcomes, we have sought more opportunities to mix our ELL and NES students during the fall and spring semesters too. We designed a number of collaborative learning projects for those separately tracked students to interact and create meaning together via scaffolded listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities. Furthermore, we shared our classroom experiences and projects with other instructors in departmental professional development workshops; the feedback from those workshops revealed that instructors across ELL and NES course sections expressed quite a bit of interest in mixing their students and partnering with other instructors as well. As an extension of that conversation, the department has added regular conversation hours, run through the writing center, again helping students to engage with more speakers of Englishes and college institutions. These sessions are led by faculty and tutors, again mirroring the model from our experimental summer session.

Departmental changes followed the experiment as well, and while not all of the structural changes can be attributed to the experiment, we believe the changes were in part informed by the success of mixing ELLs and NES for upper-level remedial work. For one, remedial reading and writing work at the college was part of a separate department from English at the time of the experiment, and since then the departments have merged. A major

impetus for this change was the developing awareness that contextualizing remedial work was crucial for students. In addition, as the practice of keeping NES and ELLs separate was questioned by this experiment, the point of keeping remediation separate from English was also questioned at this time. The college's ALP model also followed our experiment, and a major element of its success has been the benefits for ELLs (see Anderst, Maloy, and Shahar for overview of program and benefits for ELL). The argument for ELLs in the ALP was made in large part by the success of this experiment.

Ultimately, the results suggest this intervention, which had the mixing of NES and ELL populations, the use of gateway course materials, and SI appears to improve pass rates for ELLs while not significantly affecting the NES. The results taken with our own observations and reflections suggest that mixing of NES and ELLs in upper-level remediation is useful in that it increases potential English interlocutors and opportunities. What's more, students, ELLs, as well as NES, were more engaged in a curriculum that contextualized the remediation. The success of the curriculum and the mixing validates the argument for a translangual approach advocated for in the past. These results have been incorporated into the college's remediation program in significant ways and have contributed to the merging of the college's remedial department with English as well as to its ALP model. The evidence from previous research and this study suggests the mixing of NES and ELL populations is beneficial for ELLs from at least one level below credit-bearing writing classes. Finally, we have shown that the university's move away from all-or-nothing exit testing for remedial students is an important step in matching student development with credit-bearing classes.

Conclusion

With more and more linguistically diverse students enrolling in two-year colleges, mixing ELLs and NES provides important benefits. Perhaps most importantly, bringing ELLs and NES together in the same composition classroom creates opportunities for instructors and students alike: Instructors can better integrate a translangual approach into their course pedagogy and assessment practice while students can use their linguistic differences as a resource to enhance learning. For ELLs in particular, the benefit of mixing emanates from interacting and creating meaning through informal and formal interactions that would not likely occur in separately tracked classes. Finally, mixing ELLs and NES coincides with recent best practices in developmental education, most notably the shift toward acceleration learning

models, that is contextualizing developmental learning. In the case of ALP, that context is the credit-bearing class, and in this model, there is the richer linguistic environment for both ELLs and NES.

Notes

1. Placement into intermediate- and advanced-level developmental writing courses is determined by the results of the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW), which has been a requirement for almost all QCC students since 2010 (as of Fall 2019 will not be used for placement, except under certain circumstances). The CATW is a 90-minute exam that asks students to respond to a 250-300 word 10th-12th grade level reading passage. Students are asked to summarize the text and respond to significant idea(s) by handwriting a well-developed, multi-paragraph essay. ELLs and NES who score between 50 and 55 are placed in advanced-level developmental writing courses, but they may also progress into the advanced-level class from an intermediate-level class after successfully completing the required course work and earning a score between a 50 and 55 on the English Department's final writing exam, which is similar to the CATW. During a typical fifteen-week spring or fall semester, students receive 60 hours of instruction with full-time or part-time faculty and meet twice per week for approximately one hour and forty minutes. At the end of the semester, students who have completed their course work can re-take the CATW, and those who achieve a score of 56 or above can exit remediation.
2. Both instructors in this study had pass rates in the past that were relatively similar to department averages for both NES and ELL populations.
3. As a way to understand what variable(s) may be leading to exit score outcomes in the summer intervention, a regression was run. A regression considers whether certain input variables (like ELL status) are affecting an output variable (in this case, exit score). A regression also looks to create a formula that states how much an input variable affects an outcome. This was done for this data as a way of understanding variable(s) most predictably affecting performance on exit scores in this intervention. If we were to find that ELLs or NES is an important variable, then we can say that the intervention "discriminates" in one way or the other for or against that population as that input predictably affects exit test score. Interestingly, a regression with ELL status, repeater status, entering CATW score, and adjusted CATW score as variables shows the adjusted

placement score is a good predictor of the exit exam score on the CATW. This means that, of the variables we considered, only adjusted incoming placement score predicted how well the students would do on the exit, not repeater status, not ELL status. This suggests the intervention does not favor one population over the other in a predictable way in terms of ELL status.

When a regression is run with only the adjusted score against the exit score, again there is a statistically significant difference, confirming the statistical correlation between adjusted placement score and exit score for this intervention. Equation (1) represents the relationship ($p < .01$). (1) Exit Score = $1.4467 * \text{CATW Enter Adjusted} - 18.0037$

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APPENDIX

Description of Class Assignments

The first set of articles dealt with societal roles and the expectations or assumptions that coincide with those roles. In “Mother Tongue,” Amy Tan addresses the notion of native language and how “broken English” influenced her perception of identity in family situations and in interactions with an often unforgiving outside world. After reading this text, our students discussed their own experiences with language in smaller groups mixed with ELLs and NES. Students then wrote an essay that would be similar to the CATW in which they were asked to summarize main ideas, discuss one significant idea, and include some type of personal experience that would be connected to the passage.

Upon completion of the Tan text, we paired readings with similar themes from differing viewpoints once again so that students would develop their ability to analyze and synthesize texts. The next set of readings dealt with the themes of trust and mistrust in society and corresponding societal roles: “In and of Ourselves We Trust” by Andy Rooney provides a positive stance on how most people are innately good citizens even if they can make selfish or reckless choices with impunity, while Brent Staples laments racially motivated mistrust among citizens and how that mistrust adversely affects perceptions of identity and societal interactions in “Just Walk on By.” Again, ELLs and NES engaged in mixed group discussions and worked on CATW-type essays that compared and contrasted those articles.

The final assignment included the assigned reading, “The Great TV Debate” by Jason Kelly, and the additional requirement of conducting research that would contextualize the debate with regard to societal impact on TV watching, especially for children. After the initial discussion to ensure an understanding of the author’s ambivalent position on the issue, the students had more autonomy than in previous assignments. Pairs of students had the choice to find data from several websites to support their chosen side of the TV debate and create a Powerpoint slideshow or other visual/multimedia response to present their position to the other students. The pairs conducted their research and crafted their digital response in the ALLC, but gave their presentations in the assigned classroom. Throughout the whole process, we served as facilitators as students decided on the direction and scope of their research, creation of the digital response, the written product, and class presentation.

Binary Structures in a Translingual Age: Investigating Community College Writing Placement to Support Linguistic Diversity

Jennifer Maloy

ABSTRACT: This article argues the importance of designing writing placement procedures that support linguistic diversity at community colleges. Using data on community college writing programs and student demographics at an urban community college, it examines prevailing structures of ESL and developmental writing programs at two-year schools and identifies potential problems with existing models. In addition, the article recommends a translingual approach to writing placement, particularly in community colleges with diverse student populations. A translingual approach acknowledges the complexities of language use and values student agency throughout the placement process.

KEYWORDS: community college; ESL placement; translingual; writing program administration

Composition has taken a translingual turn, as our scholarship and pedagogies increasingly acknowledge the growing diversity not only of student populations in higher education but also of the languages and language varieties students bring to writing classrooms. Within this translingual turn, many in the field have argued the importance of valuing linguistic difference in composition pedagogy and research and examined ways to study and support the complexities of individual and communal language practices in and beyond English. The momentum that “translingual approaches to composition” (Horner et al.) has gained in recent years reflects scholars’ and teachers’ identification and appreciation of the language varieties that students bring to their writing classroom as well as our willingness to draw upon students’ linguistic experiences as a resource. Many composition

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instructors may enact translingual pedagogies in their classrooms through discussions of linguistically diverse assigned texts, approaches to error that contextualize variants in language systems, and writing assignments that ask students to explore their own language experiences as well as those of a variety of authors. Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) may even promote such work across first-year or basic writing classrooms. However, as our work on language diversity grows, so too should our interrogation of the ways in which our writing placement and program designs are based on a prevailing “myth of linguistic homogeneity” (Matsuda).

To a large extent, our field has not considered how we may implement translingual approaches on a programmatic level. Writing programs still may be structured in ways that assign all students—those who are monolingual, those who speak dialects, and/or those who are multilingual—static linguistic identities through placement into *English-as-a-Second-Language* (ESL) or *Native English Speaker* (NES) writing courses. While ignoring the nuances of linguistically diverse student populations, placement processes such as these often position students differently across campus based on binary categories. What is more, the writing courses that students are assigned to take—be they developmental or basic writing, ESL writing, or first-year writing—may be housed in different departments that draw upon divergent scholarship and pedagogy. For example, colleges may have ESL departments or programs for international students that offer writing classes that are separate from those offered in English departments or composition programs, or basic writing courses may be housed in a Developmental or Remedial Education department separate from an English department that houses first-year writing courses. These divisions may occur for many pedagogical, disciplinary, political, and/or financial reasons; however, such divisions also may challenge inter-department collaboration and understanding while shuffling students into various programs with different expectations and philosophies related to writing and language use. Because the design of a writing program—from placement to course sequence to learning objectives—lays the foundation for the work that takes place in individual classrooms and among faculty, it is important for us to consider the extent to which the structures we create for our writing programs support the exploration of students’ linguistic heterogeneity and challenge a binary categorization of students as ESL or NES.¹

This is particularly the case for community college writing programs, which often face more diverse student populations and simultaneously more institutional obstacles such as high attrition rates, large numbers of new students each semester, and inadequate funding. Students coming to community colleges may experience a lack of comprehensive advising, decentralized and poorly located student service offices, and ineffective developmental education structures (Dougherty et al. 8-11). Such serious challenges may inhibit possibilities for innovating writing programs in ways that support and foster the linguistic diversity of students. As students are categorized as either ESL or NES within placement practices and program structures, the obstacles outlined above demonstrate the likelihood that they will struggle to learn about the variations across ESL and NES writing courses as well as to understand how much agency they may have in choosing writing courses. All of these factors can limit possibilities for acknowledging multilingual students' complex relationships to languages in the writing classrooms on community college campuses where this work is most needed. While an awareness of these issues is important for those of us teaching writing in community colleges with diverse populations, it also is essential to use this awareness to interrogate the extent to which our programmatic structures and divisions support linguistically diverse students.

In this article, I examine issues surrounding categorization and placement of linguistically diverse community college students, draw attention to the ways in which ESL and NES divisions often do not represent students' linguistic complexities, and call for us to rethink our approaches to placement in ways that further support translingual approaches to composition. Specifically, I argue that we should consider carefully possibilities for offering students information and agency in ESL/NES placement processes and that we foster open dialogue about students' language backgrounds and practices across all writing programs, basic/developmental, ESL, and first-year writing alike.

The Translingual Turn in Community College Contexts

In 2011, two articles affirmed the concept of "translingual approaches" in the field of Composition. In January, Bruce Horner, Min-Zhan Lu, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and John Trimbur published "Language Difference in Writing: Towards a Translingual Approach" in *College English*, arguing that traditional approaches to teaching composition in the United States assume a "linguistically homogeneous Standard English" and "are at odds with facts"

(303). The facts to which they refer are that a majority of English speakers do not speak Standard English, and for this reason, teachers of English should acknowledge this reality as part of the work of the writing classroom. The authors argue for taking what they term a “translingual approach” to composition, treating language as a resource for producing meaning, and seeing the diverse language uses of not only multilingual students but also students who would claim to be monolingual English speakers. Such an approach, they assert, “adds recognition that the formation and definition of languages and language varieties are fluid. Further, this approach insists on viewing language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized” (Horner et al. 304). In the fall of the same year, Horner published “Relocating Basic Writing” in the *Journal of Basic Writing* in order to position Basic Writing within a tradition of translingual approaches, approaches that see language use as always evolving, being challenged, and challenging users. Here he says that Basic Writing has and should continue to be a space where active investigation and negotiation of language takes place.

Translingual approaches to composition, be they rooted in practice like “Language Difference in Writing” or theory in the cases of “Relocating Basic Writing,” are extensions of scholarship on multilingualism such as Braj Kachru’s decades of research on world Englishes; Ofelia Garcia’s research on translanguaging; A. Suresh Canagarajah’s work on “shuttling between languages” and codemeshing; and Lu, Horner, and Trimbur’s collaborative work on multilingual composition. All of these scholars explore the ways in which multilingual speakers and writers actively negotiate multiple language systems as well as the ways in which language systems evolve through use of diverse speakers. Translingual approaches to composition build upon these seminal ideas, calling compositionists to elucidate—and encourage—such language work in composition classrooms and acknowledge that all individual language users adopt and contribute to multiple language systems. This has resonated more and more with composition instructors and scholars, mainly because, as Horner et al.’s “Language Difference in Writing” begins, a majority of English speakers use a variety of Englishes as well as speak English as one of multiple languages. Some recent expansions of translingual approaches within composition include scholarship on student writing (Gonzales), classroom practices (Mlynarczyk), community writing projects (Kimball), and teacher training (Canagarajah, “Translanguaging”). Scholars also connect *translingualism* to the fields of Applied Linguistics and Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) as well as studies of code switching and code meshing (Canagarajah, “Codemeshing;” Sebba et al.).

However, there also have been calls to use caution when appropriating and expanding the term *translingual*. In “Clarifying the Relationship between L2 Writing and Translingual Writing: An Open Letter to Writing Studies Editors and Organizational Leaders,” a group of prominent second-language (L2) writing scholars argue that it is necessary to acknowledge the unique differences between students who speak varieties of languages and students who are L2 writers. They state, “translingual writing is a particular orientation to how language is conceptualized and implicated in the study and teaching of writing” and should by no means replace the expertise of L2 scholarship and pedagogies (Atkinson et al. 384). English Language Learners (ELLs) have unique needs to be supported by L2 specialists; therefore, the authors argue, translingual approaches should not be seen as synonymous with second language writing instruction. While translingual approaches represent an ethos in which instructors and scholars demonstrate the value of language diversity in the structure and practices of their classrooms, those adopting the approach also need to consider best practices for learning the uses and nuances of multiple language systems. The authors demonstrate the need for careful consideration of the unique experiences and needs of multilingual students rather than relying upon the assumption that an appreciation of diversity is enough to support students. For example, while exploring the fluidity of language use in a composition classroom may be considered a translingual approach, it may not ensure that ELLs in that classroom are being provided the support they need in their development as English users. The authors affirm that substantial support to linguistically diverse students requires careful design of all aspects of a writing program, from placement to curriculum design to programmatic assessment, and yet we need not abandon a translingual ethos as we consider how to best serve ELLs. Instead, it seems particularly important to ensure that L2 scholarship inform translingual approaches in order to bolster support for ELLs across college campuses, within and beyond ESL writing courses.

At two-year colleges, supporting linguistically diverse students poses unique challenges as student populations are generally more diverse—in terms of educational, socio-economic, racial, ethnic, national, and linguistic backgrounds—and a wide variety of points of entry into the college exists for students, particularly those identified as ESL. Adopting translingual approaches across programs may be particularly daunting and yet is particularly necessary at community colleges due to the uniqueness of their student populations. A snapshot of community college student demographics puts this into perspective: of the 12.3 million students enrolled in community

colleges in 2014, 36% were first-generation college students, 57% were female, 58% received financial aid, and 38% received Pell Grants (Fast Facts). In addition, 57% of all Black students begin higher education at community colleges (Fast Facts), 2/3 of all Latino students begin higher education at community colleges, and almost half of Asian or Pacific Islander students attend community colleges (Bunch and Endris). While hard numbers can be difficult to determine, evidence also has shown that immigrant and language minority students are more likely to attend community colleges than US-born and monolingual students (Bunch and Endris). This profile of students demonstrates why translingual approaches to writing program design are so essential at two-year colleges: greater socio-economic, racial, ethnic, and national diversity ensures greater linguistic diversity on community college campuses. Community college students bring a variety of linguistic resources with them to their English classes, be they basic writing, ESL, first-year writing, or advanced composition classes. The profile of community college students also demonstrates the stakes of supporting such students in writing classrooms, as research from sources such as the Community College Research Center at Columbia Teacher's College also has shown that "immigrants, students of color, and low-income students have lower odds of completing their postsecondary education" ("Underrepresented Students"). The stakes for engaging increasingly diverse student populations are high at community colleges, and the need for innovation is essential.

Such innovation that focuses on multilingual students at community colleges, however, often is enacted by individual instructors rather than programmatically. For example, Andrea Parmegiani describes translingual pedagogies in a learning community in which Spanish-speaking ESL students enrolled in an ESL writing course and a Spanish composition course. He argues this project positioned students as both experts and learners within the classroom, challenging the deficit narrative his institution used to describe this population of students by valuing their linguistic knowledge and offering multilingual students the opportunity to write across languages and develop both Spanish and English literacies. Likewise, Rashi Jain argues that exploring and envisioning translingual pedagogies in ESL classrooms requires both students and instructors to examine their linguistic backgrounds and identities. She describes class practices that encourage students to compare and contrast usages of language while she also instructs them on the norm in their target language (Standard American English), acknowledging that language instruction in formal settings is often a "compromise" across discourses (511). Both of these examples demonstrate promising possibilities

for translingual approaches in writing classrooms with ELLs, showing how instructors can integrate an exploration of the nuances of language use. However, innovative classroom approaches like these should be reinforced programmatically as well.

To fully realize the possibilities for translingual writing we need to ensure that our program structures, beginning with our placement processes, support the translingual pedagogies we seek to implement in individual classrooms. Students in classrooms that practice translingual approaches as the work of composition benefit from understanding that their linguistic experiences are resources for further language study; however, unless our writing programs also support this idea—through placement policies, course design, and assessment procedures—the long-term reinforcement of this point may be lost on students who are continually positioned on community college campuses in ways that promote the deficit model that Parmegiani mentions. While rejecting English-Only or monolingual ideologies embedded in institutional structures is possible, it has proven to be slow-moving and fraught with challenges. One of the main reasons this is so challenging, as Christine Tardy demonstrates in an examination of her own writing program, is that the prevailing investment in the predominance and importance of Standard American English by instructors, students, and administrators can complicate change on a programmatic scale. Change at this level requires the investment of many individuals, additional funding, and sometimes political resistance on campus. Most importantly, it requires critical reflection of individuals' investment in Standard American English as well as a critical examination of the extent to which writing programs affirm monolingual ideologies.

Interrogating Common Community College Writing Placement and Structures

Initial steps towards programmatic change necessitate reflection: specifically, reflection of the methods of identifying and placing multilingual students into NES or ESL courses in addition to reflection of the programmatic structures that facilitate such placement. The *National Census of Writing* for two-year institutions provides a glimpse into some of the potential hindrances to a translingual approach to writing programs, including the disparate course offerings for students identified as ESL as well as the physical separation of departments across campuses. Out of 144 two-year institutions surveyed, 88% offered supports for ELLs, 70% of responding schools

indicated that they offered ESL courses, and 80% of responding schools stated that these ESL courses were separate from basic writing courses. The percentages of four-year schools that offer support for ELLs was similar, and in the case of offering ESL courses, lower by 10%. This data demonstrates that community colleges offer more courses for ELLs, a reality confirmed when we examine the types of supports for ELLs in two-year versus four-year schools: at community colleges, 46% of ELLs are required to take a basic writing class, while only 30% of ELLs at four-year schools are required to take such a class. Although this information does not reveal where these basic writing classes are located and whether they integrate students identified as ESL and NES, it does reveal that more ELLs end up in basic writing at two-year schools than at four-year schools. What is more, the census reveals that students are placed into ESL courses differently at two-year versus four-year schools. At two-year schools 67 out of 76 respondents (or 88%) indicated that ESL students were identified or placed, at least in part, through a writing placement test of some kind, while 50% or fewer respondents used TOEFL/ACT/SAT scores, faculty or advisor referral, and/or self-placement. At four-year schools, only 54% of respondents indicated that their programs relied on writing placement tests, while 71% used TOEFL/ACT/SAT scores, and 50% or fewer used faculty or advisor referral and self-placement (Gladstein).

While a greater reliance on national standardized tests makes sense at four-year schools with higher numbers of students coming directly from high schools in the United States and at schools with higher numbers of international students, a greater reliance on a placement writing exam in two-year schools may mean that students are more likely to be placed based on only one example of their writing, often in a timed-writing environment. This could potentially become problematic when students are being placed, with little agency, into writing classes based on one sample of high-stakes timed writing rather than on a more accurate representation of their linguistic and writing abilities. As George Bunch and Ann Endris have documented, students may take placement tests, which often dictate their placement in non-credit bearing ESL courses, without preparing for them or understanding the consequences of their performance on such tests (166). We must be aware of the ramifications of relying upon single measures such as placement exams, particularly when we do not inform or consult with students before placing them in various programs that are sometimes located in different departments across the college and offer them different resources and support.

The *National Census of Writing* also reveals another important difference between two-year and four-year schools in terms of serving ELL populations: at two-year schools, only 29% of schools indicated that ESL courses are offered in English departments, while 57% of ESL courses were offered in an “other” space on campus, most likely another academic department. In four-year schools, 30% of ESL courses are offered through English departments (similar to the two-year school number), 32% of ESL programs are housed in an “other” location on campus, and 17% of ESL programs are located within writing programs (Gladstein). Thus, in a majority of scenarios at community colleges, students identified as ESL are positioned outside of the English department and/or a writing program. It seems unlikely that two individual departments—or even programs—would possess the same learning outcomes and approaches to pedagogy, increasing the possibility for inequitable experiences across different programs. While different departments surely will have their strengths and offer students opportunities for developing their writing, this should give us pause to consider what the implications of this division might be on promoting translanguingual approaches to writing on a programmatic level. Institutional separation may make it less likely for faculty to talk across departments about working with linguistically diverse students and supporting them through careful writing pedagogies. In addition, separation may accompany inequitable resources and support across departments, which affects students and faculty alike.

Dictating multilingual students’ linguistic identities by defining their relationship to English—either as “native” or “second”—is problematic both because it positions students differently in academic terms and because, by its inherent binary nature, it resists the complexities of language use, complexities that enable students and faculty to learn from one another’s language experiences. While we may say that it is possible to offer both NES and ESL courses that value students’ linguistic experiences equally, though perhaps differently, a closer examination of how programs are structured, particularly at the community college level, problematizes the concept of “separate but equal” if we genuinely wish to design placement processes that support translanguingual approaches to composition. However, when we design writing programs that acknowledge students’ linguistic complexities and place students within these programs in ways that show we value these complexities, we promote classroom spaces where the learning we can experience—from language, about language, and within and across languages—is ingrained.

ESL and NES Student Placement at an Urban Community College

Community college writing programs that rely on static representations of students' linguistic experiences in the form of a binary division of ESL and NES tracks seem to run counter to translingual approaches to composition. Yet, how can we accurately categorize linguistically diverse students using a placement process that acknowledges the range of students' language backgrounds? Is it even possible or desirable to embed such acknowledgement in our placement processes? Often the answers to these questions can be challenging because the information that writing programs have about students—in terms of linguistic backgrounds—is limited and/or incomplete. The complexities of students' linguistic experiences commonly are not represented in the demographic information collected in the admissions process and in the writing exams used to place students. This is particularly complicated at community colleges with large populations of students who move to, or back and forth from, the United States at a variety of ages and who may speak a language other than English at home. When writing program structures rely on ESL or NES categorizations of students, there is not room to account for complexities of linguistic diversity, even when information about students' linguistic experiences is available during the placement process.

To exemplify this loss of complexity within the placement process, I examine the placement of community college students at a diverse campus over the course of two semesters, comparing and contrasting students' placement within a binary ESL and NES course structure to the more nuanced representation of their language backgrounds collected through an additional survey. I surveyed students over the course of two semesters, Fall 2012 and Spring 2013, in order to explore some of the similarities and differences between these groups at a diverse urban community college located within a large university system. At my research site at the time of my study, almost 41% percent of the freshman class spoke a language other than English at home, and 28% of all students were born outside of the United States. Despite this linguistic and national diversity of these students, 69% of this freshman class attended local public high schools (Community College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment), demonstrating that this community college has a relatively low international student population, and that a majority of its multilingual students attended at least some school in the United States.

While the potential for translingual pedagogical approaches is clear in such an environment regardless of whether a writing course is designated ESL or NES, it still matters a great deal which specific courses students enter. Like the majority of community colleges responding to the *National Census of Writing*, my research site relies upon a high-stakes timed placement exam as one of the main determinants for placing students in non-credit ESL, NES developmental, or first-year writing courses. In general, students are placed into ESL or NES developmental writing courses through a university-wide placement process. The university policy states that if students do not receive a set score on SAT, ACT, or state exams—or if they attended high school outside of the United States, have been out of school for some time, or have earned their GED—they are asked to take a university-wide timed writing exam. Students who fall into the categories above take this timed-writing exam once before their semester begins in order for their placement into a writing course to be determined. When students take the exam, they are asked to read a short passage and then write an essay responding to the ideas in the passage in 90 minutes. Each student's essay then is scored by university faculty members in multiple categories connected to understanding of the assignment and the reading, development of ideas, organization, sentence clarity, and mechanics. When the scorers read each essay, they are able to provide an ESL designation, based on the scorers' review of the student's writing and any information a student may provide in optional questions about the student's language background included in the testing booklet. This may be used along with a student's score on the exam, as well as any additional admissions data, to place students into ESL or NES developmental writing courses.

At my research site, both ESL and NES developmental writing courses are offered within the same department, much like many of the two-year schools responding to the *National Census of Writing*. To gain a better sense of the department's population of writing students in both ESL and NES sections, I distributed a linguistic and educational background survey to students enrolled in 35 sections of ESL or NES developmental writing courses across fall and spring semesters in 2012-2013. The survey I distributed consisted of questions about students' language practices, their educational backgrounds, their cultural identifications, their nationality, and their placement process at the community college.² A total of 521 students completed the survey, with 270 students completing the survey in the fall and 250 in the spring. In the fall, 136 students surveyed were enrolled in the upper or lower level of NES developmental writing, 130 students were enrolled in

one of three levels of ESL developmental writing, and 4 students did not indicate the class in which they were enrolled. In the spring, 112 students were enrolled in upper or lower level NES writing courses, 133 students were enrolled in ESL writing courses, and 2 students did not indicate the class in which they were enrolled.

The results from the survey reveal that, out of the 270 students surveyed in the fall semester, only 38 students, or 14%, indicated they were born in the United States and grew up in a monolingual English-speaking household. Likewise, out of the 249 students surveyed in the spring semester only 39, or 16%, of students indicated they were U.S.-born monolingual English speakers.³ These numbers show a vast majority of the students in both ESL and NES sections of the department's writing classes could be identified as multilingual students. This revelation demonstrated the need to examine the large group of students who revealed their multilingualism through the survey and to determine exactly how the multilingual students in the ESL courses differed from those in the NES courses. The answer could have been as simple as those multilingual students in the NES classes were US-born bilingual students or students who moved to the United States as young children and grew up speaking English in school and possibly at home. However, when asked on the survey, "How long have you lived in the United States?" and "How old were you when you moved to the United States?" multilingual students in NES classes indicated that they had moved to the United States at all ages, that they had lived in the United States in some cases for many years and in some cases only a few months. Likewise, the data from the ESL students demonstrated a similar level of diversity: some students moved to the United States quite recently while others had lived in the United States for many years. When asked "What language did you grow up speaking?" and "If English is not the first language you learned, how old were you when you began speaking English?" some students revealed that they grew up speaking English while others only learned English in the last years of high school.

A close examination of this type of demographic data demonstrates the ways in which students' linguistic backgrounds often complicate—and generally transcend—the straightforward division between NES and ESL upon which writing placement relies. If community college writing programs do not have a clear conception of what distinguishes an ESL or NES student writer—and do not enact that conception through writing placement—those invested in a translingual approach to writing might ask why the division exists in specific local conditions or at all. If a closer look at the populations of ESL and NES writing courses reveal the ways in which

language use is fluid, the ways in which the lived experiences of individuals influence the ways in which they use English(es), and the ways in which all students are learning—and creating—the relationship they have to academic discourse in English, then again a translingual approach to writing would call into question the purpose of such divisions. These divisions need to be investigated not only because they reveal complexities of students' linguistic backgrounds but also because they reveal these complexities in the face of important realities: one, that ELLs do need support to succeed in community colleges, and two, that the longer ELLs are in stand-alone, non-credit bearing ESL courses, the more difficult that success becomes. Taking a translingual approach to placement requires an interrogation of our placement policies and writing program structures to ensure that we support the linguistic diversity of all students across campus and that we view students as agents in their development of multiple literacies.

In further analyzing the demographics of multilingual survey participants who appeared in both ESL and NES courses, I wish to demonstrate the ways in which binary categories such as “native” and “second language” are challenged when we look at students who could be classified as Generation 1.5. As Paul Kei and Aya Matsuda argue in their essay, “The Erasure of Resident ESL Writers,” the term Generation 1.5 may be useful for teachers in identifying students who are not “traditional” monolingual English speakers (59), as it refers to immigrants who come to the United States at some point after their formal schooling has begun and, as ELLs, speak English as a second (or third or fourth) language. However, as Matsuda and Matsuda demonstrate, the term runs the risk of becoming just another categorization through which we can assign students a static linguistic identity that can fit into institutional structures. Despite its problematic nature, the classification of multilingual, multicultural, and/or transnational immigrant students under this umbrella term has helped scholars and educators to more closely examine the linguistic and cultural experiences of college writing students and to distinguish the experiences and needs of Generation 1.5 students from international students with limited experience or knowledge of English and/or U.S. culture.

For the purposes of my survey analysis of Generation 1.5 students, I classify any student who indicated that their first spoken or heard language was not English and who moved to the United States between the ages of 6-16. I sought to identify Generation 1.5 students in order to see how linguistically diverse students were being placed within the program.⁴ Tables 1 and 2 below demonstrate that students who could be classified as Generation 1.5

were placed in both ESL and NES sections in the semesters during which I conducted my survey.

Table 1: Students Classified as Generation 1.5, Fall Semester

<i>Course</i>	<i>Generation 1.5</i>	<i>Total Students</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
ESL Lower Level	12	46	26%
ESL Upper Level	19	77	25%
NES Lower Level	13	57	23%
NES Upper Level	8	78	10%
All Courses	52	258	20%

Table 2: Students Classified as Generation 1.5, Spring Semester

<i>Course</i>	<i>Generation 1.5</i>	<i>Total Students</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
ESL Lower Level	14	35	40%
ESL Upper Level	24	81	30%
NES Lower Level	1	14	7%
NES Upper Level	23	101	23%
All Courses	62	231	27%

Tables 1 and 2 reveal that Generation 1.5 students were present in both ESL and NES sections surveyed, as well as in both lower and upper levels of writing courses. In the fall semester, a total of 52 out of 258 students, or 20%, could be classified as Generation 1.5. The highest percentages of Generation 1.5 students were placed in the lower-level ESL course, at 26%, and the upper-level ESL course, with 25%. In the lower-level NES course, 23% could be classified as Generation 1.5, and in the upper-level NES 10% of students could be categorized as such. In the spring semester, the percentage of this group of students rose to 27%, or 62 out of 231 students. Again, higher percentages appeared in ESL courses, with 40% of the lower-level ESL sections consisting of students who could be classified as Generation 1.5 and 30% in the upper-level ESL course. In the lower-level NES courses, 7% of the student population (just one student) fell into this category, while 23% did in the upper-level NES courses in the spring. While a larger overall number of these students appeared in ESL courses versus NES courses each semester,

Generation 1.5 students nonetheless were present in NES courses as well, and in healthy numbers. The number of such students within given levels and overall vary each semester, demonstrating the fluctuations of student population inherent in the placement process.

With the consistent appearance of multilingual students in all writing courses, the question then becomes, how are these multilingual students placed into ESL sections of writing different than those who are placed into NES sections? When asked at what age students moved to the United States, the average age for these students was 14 in both the lower level and upper level ESL courses surveyed, while the average age in the NES writing courses was 11 in the lower level and 12 in the upper level. Thus, in general, Generation 1.5 students who came to the United States during high school were more often placed in ESL courses, while the population in the NES courses consisted of students who immigrated to the United States at a younger age. This difference makes sense when we consider that each year an English Language Learner spends in the United States could mean more exposure to and use of English. However, an examination of the age of immigration for all linguistic minority students responding to my survey who were born outside of the United States revealed the largest number of students in both ESL and NES students immigrated between the ages of 15 and 19. Therefore, even though there were more students who immigrated before high school in NES sections, there still were many linguistic minority students in *both* ESL and NES sections who immigrated in the last one or two years of high school or after they completed high school outside of the United States.

One notable difference between Generation 1.5 students in ESL versus NES courses was birth country, as the populations of ESL and NES writing courses varied significantly in terms of national origin. The student population of both the lower and upper levels of NES courses are nationally and culturally diverse, with students claiming to have been born in over fifteen different countries. However, in both levels of ESL, there were large numbers of students from China—46% in the lower level, and 47% in the upper level. The charts that follow provide a visual representation of the levels of diversity in each course across the fall and spring semesters.

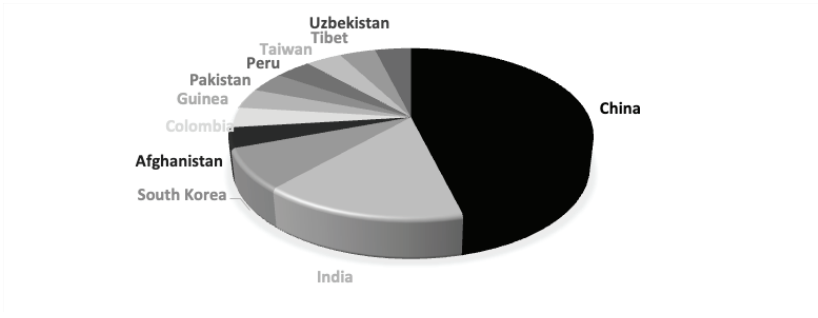


Figure 1. Birth Country, ESL Lower Level

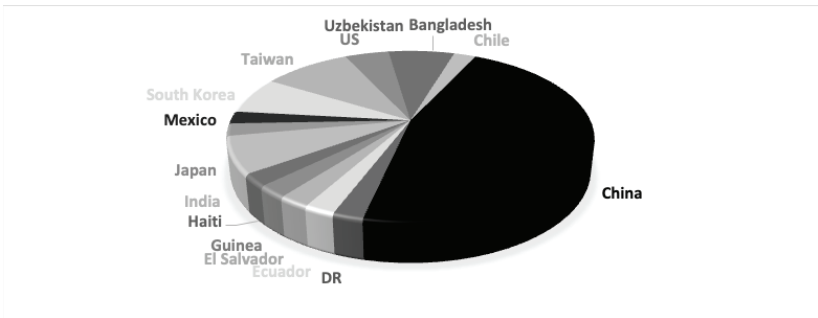


Figure 2. Birth Country, ESL Upper Level

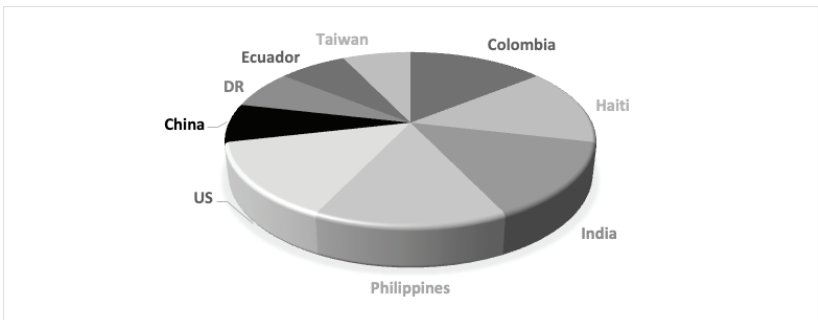


Figure 3. Birth Country, NES Lower Level

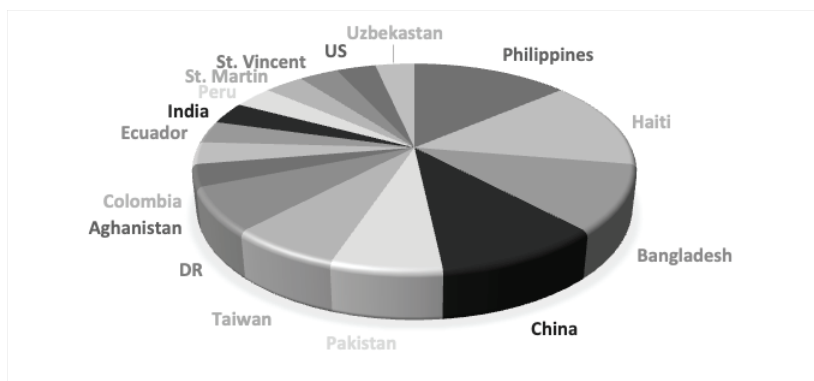


Figure 4. Birth Country, NES Upper Level

Figures 1-4 reveal the developmental NES courses in the survey are *more* linguistically and culturally diverse than ESL courses. The overall percentages of birthplaces for all students in ESL and NES courses reveal that only 7 out of 248, or 3%, of all students in NES courses indicated being born in China, even though 111, or 45%, indicated being born outside of the United States. In ESL courses, however, 94 out of 263, or 38% of all students indicated being born in China when a total of 95% of all students stated that they were born outside of the United States. These high numbers stand in contrast to the overall percentage of all students at the college who stated they were born in China as of Fall 2012: 4.2%, or 669 out of a total of 15,711 students (Community College Office of Institutional Research and Assessment).

Overall, the student populations of both ESL and NES developmental courses at my research site prove to be linguistically diverse; however, they also reveal the existence of a form of linguistic homogeneity, even though the type of homogeneity—the predominance of students from China in ESL classes—is different from the homogeneity of English in NES courses that might be more readily imaginable in writing programs of this kind. The parameters of my study do not explain why this sort of linguistic isolation occurred during these semesters within the writing program at this particular community college. Students' daily English use is dependent upon a series of individual factors—including family and living situation, employment, residence within communities that may or may not be linguistically isolated, and education background—that reach far beyond their experiences at community college. For example, when asked, "How often do you speak English in your daily life?" the median response (out of 100%, 75%, 50%, and 25% or less of the day) was 50% for Generation 1.5 students in both levels of ESL

and the upper-level NES course, while the median was slightly higher for those in the lower-level NES course (62.5%). Generation 1.5 students in NES courses indicated that they spoke English on average 62.5% of the day, while students in ESL courses averaged 50%. It does generally seem to be the case that the students who were placed into ESL courses spoke and heard English less often than students in NES courses. Thus, the placement of students in the two semesters I examined may reflect patterns of usage and need within respective populations.

Overall, my study demonstrates that placement procedures may affect the demographic make-up of ESL and NES courses in unexpected ways, ways that might not be apparent through the demographic data collected by a college or even a writing program through an official placement process, particularly an official placement that relies upon one high-stakes writing exam for placement. Although it is not in itself problematic that students from a particular national, cultural, or linguistic background are placed into ESL courses, WPAs need to be aware of this possibility and understand how their placement processes could promote—or resist—such divisions. They also, as Tardy discusses in “Enacting and Transforming Local Language Policies,” may need to examine how such data may reveal underlying ideologies about Standard American English as well as how different variations of English are acknowledged within the placement process. From a translingual perspective, any isolation of a particular group of students based on language practices would need to be investigated in order to understand whether such positioning of students is based on assumptions about language and use of English(es) more than on established needs of students. While my analysis certainly supports the need for WPAs to collect detailed information about students’ language backgrounds on a regular basis, it also supports the need for WPAs to design placement procedures that anticipate fluctuations in student demographics and variation in student experiences.

Imagining a Translingual Approach to Writing Placement in Community Colleges

Two-year schools face unique challenges as they envision writing programs that support diversity and foster students as college writers. While community colleges may attract a wider array of students with varied educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds than that of students in four-year schools, the writing programs at community colleges also may be more fragmented and reliant upon limited assessment measures to make decisions

about placement, particularly in the case of multilingual students. While individual writing instructors may implement translangual approaches in their classrooms in order to encourage students to explore language difference and their identities as writers, considering how such approaches may be implemented programmatically—in terms of curriculum as well as structure—is challenging for many reasons.

One of the reasons may be that translangual approaches to composition may pertain more to an overall ethos of language as opposed to a mandate of standards or procedures. In translangual scholarship, there is more discussion of pedagogical or disciplinary values than policy. However, resisting the myth of linguistic homogeneity, teaching students to pay attention to language difference and investigate their own language use, and drawing upon students' linguistic knowledge as a resource can be implemented programmatically as well as pedagogically. As spaces that engender and support diversity, community colleges are fertile grounds for translangual approaches to writing classrooms and programs, so long as they are able to structure programs in a way that promotes linguistic diversity in writing classroom placement and practice. As this article shows, a first step in doing this relies upon an examination of the realities of placement in order to ensure that established practices do not rely upon a somewhat imaginary binary. What follows are some recommendations for how we may begin such work.

It is essential that instructors with Composition and TESOL backgrounds work together to serve linguistically diverse student populations. Because multilingual students were the majority in both ESL and NES developmental writing courses I surveyed, instructors of all courses could benefit from both a knowledge of L2 writers' needs as well as a knowledge of translangual approaches to composition. While the structure of the writing program at my research site united ESL and NES developmental writing faculty within the same department, the divisions drawn between ESL and NES students proved to be much less clear than these categories would suggest, and thus the need for faculty support across ESL and NES courses proves to be essential—and has been something the department has worked towards. Because ESL and NES developmental courses are offered in the same department at my research site, faculty members shared learning goals across these courses and also collaborated with one another to ensure that all faculty were prepared to work with linguistically diverse students. Programmatic and departmental divisions may inhibit the communication and collaboration essential to serving linguistically diverse students, particularly when linguistically diverse students exist across all writing courses—in ESL, developmental, and

first-year writing. As the *National Census of Writing* shows, ESL writing courses are more likely to be offered outside of writing programs at community colleges, even as mounting research shows the growing linguistic diversity of community college students. Regardless of the location of writing programs, the reality of linguistic diversity at community college necessitates, as Susan Miller-Cochran argues, an increase in second language specialists and training across writing programs.

We must create placement processes within which linguistically diverse students are positioned as agents in their writing placement. As Tanita Saenkhum argues in her examination of multilingual writers in first-year writing courses, a writing program's goal should be to "maximize student agency" in the placement process (111). This process would require that writing programs provide adequate information to students about their options and explanation of the various structures and course sequences designed for students. It also could include giving students agency to choose which courses seem most fitting to their experiences and needs. As Neil Meyer argues, community college writing programs should consider directed self-placement (DSP) as an option for multilingual students, particularly those who challenge binary conceptions of ESL and NES students. While there are challenges to implementing DSP in community college settings, those wishing to enact translingual approaches to writing placement need to consider seriously this option if they want to promote agency among linguistically diverse students.

Patrick Tompkins elucidates common problems community colleges may experience when trying to adopt DSP in his description of a DSP pilot program that focused on placement in developmental writing or first-year composition (rather than placement into ESL or NES developmental courses). While piloting DSP encouraged students, instructors, and counselors/advisers to rethink standard placement procedures that relied primarily on writing placement exam scores, consistently training counselors/advisers and instructors on DSP and ensuring that all students registering for courses have access to the same information and time for self-assessment may be challenging at community colleges that have limited resources and funding and enroll large numbers of students each semester (204). However, despite the potential challenges to increasing student agency in the placement process, WPAs invested in translingual approaches to composition should consider how they may engage students in the process of identifying and placing ESL and NES students, whether that involves asking more questions about language background during advisement or allowing students more agency in choosing courses. Fundamentally, the process should involve offering

students a variety of options for writing courses and clearly articulating the differences and similarities between these courses.

Translingual approaches to writing placement for linguistically diverse students also must be built on the belief that, as experienced language users, students will have valuable views on the types of courses that would best serve them. As Saenkhum and Todd Ruecker show in literature reviews of ESL placement, there are conflicting studies on ELLs' preferences towards ESL or NES courses. This is particularly the case when it comes to multilingual students who have attended some secondary schooling in the United States. Citing placement studies by Braine, Chiang and Schmida, Costino and Hyon, and Ortmeier-Hooper, Saenkhum concludes, "conflicting placement preferences and perceptions make it ... difficult to understand the placement of multilingual writers into first-year composition courses" (8). The same is the case for students being placed into non-credit ESL and developmental writing courses. Because a student's preference is based on a variety of individual factors that often cannot be accounted for in timed-writing exams or the demographic data that may be available during the placement process, it is important for us to allow students to weigh in on their placement, particularly when they are choosing among ESL and NES courses that have many of the same learning goals.

As Christine Toth discusses in her recent "Directed Self-Placement at 'Democracy's Open Door': Writing Placement and Social Justice in Community Colleges," viewing writing placement at community colleges through a social justice lens may help us to understand the goals of DSP differently, particularly at a moment in which many community colleges are moving away from the reliance upon high-stakes exams as the sole measure in placement. In her literature review of DSP, she points to some important factors for multilingual students' decisions in DSP: cultural differences regarding self-assessment; financial concerns; and complex intersections of cultural, linguistic, and national identities among students (149). However, she also identifies, in the scholarship on DSP in ESL contexts by Deborah Crusan, Gita Das Bender, and Mathew Gomes, some possibilities for designing DSP for multilingual students when local contexts and student demographics are carefully considered. Furthermore, she argues that if social justice considerations are integral parts of the design and assessment of DSP, this type of placement can be deemed successful at community colleges with diverse student populations. If we value and draw from students' linguistic diversity as an act of social justice, then exploring possibilities for DSP may help us to enact a translingual ethos across our writing programs.

Finally, we also should consider possibilities for thoughtfully integrating linguistically diverse students into basic writing and composition courses. Given programmatic restrictions or obstacles in implementing DSP at large community colleges, an alternative to DSP may be offering students more opportunities for cross-cultural writing courses. Ruecker demonstrates that the realities of current placement procedures, as well as the insufficiencies of ESL/NES dichotomies inherent in placement, support the need for an increase in cross-cultural composition courses that combine “native” English speakers and ELLs (101). He finds in his study of student satisfaction of ESL/NES placement that 79% of ESL students surveyed indicated that they wanted to be in a “class that includes both native and non-native speakers of English” (102). When multilingual students are given the option, many of them may choose courses that consist of linguistically diverse students—both ELLs and “native” English speakers—as their preferred composition experience. Therefore, writing programs that enhance student agency may also need to expand options for students, as many multilingual students may decide that courses with a mixture of ELLs and NES students will best support them. When such courses are designed through the collaboration of compositionists and L2 specialists across disciplinary divides, they will ensure that all students are able to explore their use of various language systems and learn about Standard American English in a translingual context.

The translingual turn in composition should encourage WPAs to envision writing programs as places where students are able to explore language difference and embrace a sense of agency in the linguistic decisions they make in their writing (Lu and Horner). While the placement processes we create within such writing programs may be informed by WPAs’ assessments of students’ experiences with English (and other languages), trying to better understand students’ linguistic experiences, from both the student and WPA perspective, needs to be a foundation upon which a writing program—and its placement procedure—is built. Unearthing and challenging assumptions made as part of the placement process, encouraging campus-wide discussions about students’ language backgrounds, and revising program structures that consider students’ experiences rather than a snapshot of their writing are all translingual approaches on a programmatic level.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, I use English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) to refer to the courses with this label and to students who have received this identification through the placement process. I use the term English Language Learners (ELLs) to refer more broadly to any student who is multilingual and is in the process of learning English (whether identified in an ESL context or not).
2. The creation and distribution of the survey followed IRB guidelines and was reviewed through the IRB process.
3. In the fall survey, 17 out of 270 students did not provide a response to questions about birth place and/or first languages spoken or heard in their home. In the spring survey, 7 students did not provide this information.
4. In this discussion, I did not include analysis of data from the lowest level of ESL writing, as there was no NES equivalent.

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Directed Self-Placement, Corequisite Models, and Curricular Choice

Becky L. Caouette

ABSTRACT: The author argues that significant inroads in the destigmatization of basic writing courses and students can be made when students are asked to choose not only which FYW course they believe best meets their needs (directed self-placement, or DSP) but also to choose from among a variety of courses (including corequisite courses, particularly those that bear full graduation credit). Drawing from the author's own institution, the author demonstrates how some fortuitous events allowed her to reconsider and reframe FYW curricular offerings and placement methods. The article ends with a review of the unique difficulties inherent in fully implementing universal choice and several examples of how this approach continues to offer unanticipated local opportunities to destigmatize "basic writing."

KEYWORDS: basic writing; corequisites; directed self-placement; DSP; student agency

Several years after I began my position as Director of Writing at Rhode Island College (RIC), our First-Year Writing (FYW) Program embarked on two different pilots: one, to create a new corequisite course offering under the FYW umbrella; two, to implement Directed Self-Placement (DSP) as the new form of first-year writing placement. In designing the pilots, I made a critical mistake: I did not create an assessment plan that would allow me to assess each pilot individually; instead, because I had launched both pilots in the same calendar year, they were inextricably meshed together.

It is only now, more than six years out from those pilots' beginnings, that I realize how fortuitous was my error. In the pages that follow, I theorize that successful destigmatization of "basic" writing in the postsecondary classroom¹ requires not only corequisite models (like accelerated learning programs [ALP], stretch, and mainstream), but also requires colleges and universities to embrace DSP in conjunction with these courses. Since the hallmark of both innovations is the element of choice—freedom to choose a course (DSP) depends on the opportunity to choose from among several courses (including corequisite models)—it seems logical that in order to offer

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students *genuine, unencumbered* choice, writing programs need to claim both DSP and corequisite models. Put simply, I do not believe that corequisite models can make significant inroads in destigmatizing underprepared or alternately-prepared students unless these same students are encouraged to choose which course best meets their needs.

Placement and the Corequisite Course at Rhode Island College

At RIC, DSP is *the* first-year writing placement method for our student population. A brief summary of the placement process at RIC will be of use here. Students who are expected to enroll at RIC attend Orientation-sponsored DSP sessions moderated alternately by myself or the Writing Center Director and with assistance from experienced FYW instructors as needed. The moderators collect minimal identification information (name, student number, and email) and ask students to do a bit of low-stakes reflective writing. Moderators then list the key attractions or opportunities of each course (“You might be interested in this course if...”) and assume the rhetorical stance of asking students to “opt in” to a course. DSP documents and presentations highlight crucial differences and similarities among the courses, urge students to consider their own perspectives on writing and who they are as writers, and ask students to choose a course. Moderators make themselves available for questions and provide information on transfer credit; both the Writing Center Director and the Director of Writing’s contact information are listed on the documents. Students then enroll in the course of their choosing the following day. During the first week of classes, instructors are asked to assign, read, and respond to writing samples for every student in their section(s). Instructors may discuss any concerns they have with a student (i.e., the student’s writing sample might suggest a different placement choice would better suit the student’s needs) or with me, but instructors are not allowed to move students out of sections—they must honor student choice. In this way, our method very much resembles the model introduced by Daniel J. Royer and Roger Gilles over twenty years ago (“Attitude”).

One of the four courses students may choose is FYW 100Plus, the corequisite course piloted at the same time as DSP and now offered in fall and spring semesters. The course would be classified by William Lalicker’s taxonomy as an “intensive” model much like that described by Mary T. Segall; it carries with it six credits, all of which “count” towards a student’s full-time status, GPA, and graduation totals. FYW 100Plus meets the same

outcomes as FYW 100: students are just given more time (six credit hours instead of four) and resources (class size is smaller; a Writing Center tutor meets with students at least once a week; at least one class period a week is conducted in a computer classroom) to fulfill the requirement. There is no additional work assigned. While this course is not a new model, its iteration at RIC has changed since the first semester of the pilot and, important to my argument here, in conjunction with DSP.

Potential Points of Connection Between DSP and Corequisites in Contemporary Research

Lalicker's classification of "alternatives" to basic writing (BW) structures, published in the second issue of the *Basic Writing e-Journal* (1999), affords one of the earliest examinations of the potential relationship between DSP and corequisite models. Lalicker establishes a "baseline" model of BW—the prerequisite, remedial course—and then articulates five alternatives; they include the stretch, studio, mainstream, and intensive models. He also posits DSP as one of the alternatives even though he readily admits that it "isn't really a model in the structural sense: it can be used with a wide variety of course and credit arrangements." To his credit, Lalicker observes the opportunities to innovate that DSP brings to any alternative plan, and so I quote at length:

But the attitudinal change it [DSP] seeks to foster in students—that basic writing is something students choose because they know they need it, rather than something forced upon them—may make a number of creative and effective course structure alternatives politically possible, even palatable, in the eyes of some constituencies (students, parents, faculty, administrators).

In this passage, Lalicker makes a prophetic connection between placement and course offerings, between two different ways of sponsoring student choice. While his article does not endorse DSP explicitly—he lists advantages and disadvantages to every model, DSP included—the above quotation provides a helpful example as to how an early articulation of alternative BW models considers DSP in the mix. Such a connection is not surprising given that DSP and a number of corequisite initiatives were introduced nationally within several years of each other. Kelly Ritter illustrates convincingly the presence of supplemental instruction in early BW programs at Yale and Harvard, so I don't mean to suggest here that corequisites were "invented"

twenty years ago; rather, I argue that the late 1990s and early 2000s brought an uptick in scholarly and administrative activity in corequisite innovation. Peter Adams published his early findings—findings that would lead to the corequisite movement of ALP—in 1993, though Adams et al. suggest ALP was implemented at various institutions “in the late 1990s and early 2000s” but not at his own institution (Community College of Baltimore County) until the mid-to-late aughts (55-56). Gregory Glau introduced us to the stretch model in 1996; Segall published her findings from her “intensive” model in 1995; Royer and Gilles’ groundbreaking CCC DSP article appeared in 1998, and their edited collection was published in 2003. As the above list indicates, within a ten-year span Royer and Gilles introduce DSP, several pivotal articles on corequisites are published, and Lalicker makes a direct connection between DSP and corequisite models. Yet despite the focus on student agency in all of these conversations, there has been an absence of discussion about what happens when DSP and corequisites are brought together.

This is remarkable to me given that both initiatives focus on student empowerment in meaningful ways. For DSP, students are allowed to choose their FYW course(s). This method privileges student voices over institutional voices; it trusts students to make decisions based on all available information as well as students’ own perceptions of their abilities, level of preparedness, and college expectations. In corequisites, institutions acknowledge the ways in which pre-requisite course(s) stigmatize students and delay or obstruct their progression through higher education. As Ira Shor remarks, “BW emerged soon after [the 1960s] as a new ‘identity,’ a new field of control to manage the time, thought, aspirations, composing, and credentials of the millions of non-elite students marching through the gates of academe” (93). Separately, DSP and corequisites work to empower students by fostering choice. It seems only logical, then, for institutions such as my own to consider how combining these two initiatives can maximize student agency.

Certainly, RIC is neither first nor alone in offering corequisite courses *and* DSP; while Royer and Gilles discuss DSP in relation to two courses (“An Attitude of Orientation”), other institutions—see, for example, Blakesley et al.—offer DSP in programs with multiple FYW course options including corequisites. However, a deliberate discussion of these two initiatives’ influence on each other seems notably absent from the literature.

One near-example of the ways in which DSP affects curriculum is described by Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson et al. of Miami University in their 2001 article. Given the weight assigned to scored writing submissions, their placement model could not be confidently classified as DSP; however, I would

certainly argue that it is choice-based. The “Writer’s Profile” asks writing instructors, serving as readers, to assess student submissions and to render a recommendation to the student; the student then chooses their writing course. The authors tantalizingly note that “Partly as a result of instituting the Writer’s Profile placement, we have recently changed the choices of writing courses offered. Currently, we offer several choices for students” (174), providing a table that shows a basic writing course, a studio course (one credit), and a mainstream writing course. They go on to say that in reading student writing, where students may be “adequate” in some aspects of their writing but need additional support in others, a “perceived gap in our course offerings” was revealed which “led us to develop the Writing Studio Workshop” (182). Beyond this, they do not elaborate on the ways in which the Writer’s Profile motivated the creation of an additional course—or how the new course affects their placement method. In this institution, then, choice in placement—even if it’s not DSP—seems to have affected the curricular offerings.

Likewise, Polina Chemishanova and Robin Snead articulate a choice-based placement method at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke (UNCP), though the choices seem limited to their studio model, *PlusOne*; they write that “Students were either placed in the Writing Studio [*PlusOne*] based on their diagnostic writing within the first two weeks of the semester and a portfolio of previous writing or *they self-selected to participate in the Writing Studio*” (172; emphasis mine), and go on to add that “the *PlusOne* writing labs are mandatory. . . for students enrolled in the College Opportunity Program” (175). Thus, the only choice allowed here is for those students who may wish to opt in to the *PlusOne* studio course; other populations are placed by the institution.

In both of these institutions, then, student choice in placement has restrictions. For Lewiecki-Wilson et al., even a small choice in placement led to responsive curricular innovation. For Chemishanova and Snead, opening up the *PlusOne* course to *any* student attracted an unanticipated group of students in their corequisite course. They write that “Initially, the *PlusOne* program targeted students who desired additional writing support or who had been previously unsuccessful in completing the composition sequence but has since expanded its focus” (175). One of the three groups now served by the course includes students who are particularly driven to achieve academic success given a competitive nursing program (175), but who were not the initial target student population for the *PlusOne* course. Unfortunately, here too there’s little discussion of the ways in which this unexpected population

of pre-nursing students—present in the *PlusOne* course because the program allowed for student choice in placement—changed, improved, diminished, or affected the course. I am particularly interested in the experiences of Chemishanova and Snead because, as I’ll discuss below, our experiences at RIC in some ways parallel theirs at UNCP. To be fair, neither article’s research purports to address my questions regarding the relationship between DSP and corequisite courses. But as someone who has investigated the intersection of DSP and corequisites at my own institution, I have found only these small, enticing insights in the existing literature.

This is not to say that DSP is ineffective with a two-course FYW curriculum (that’s how Royer and Gilles began, after all), nor am I insisting that schools turn to DSP if they offer corequisite FYW courses (lots of institutions still place students into their corequisite courses). Twenty years out from Lalicker’s acknowledgement of the potential influence DSP may have on “alternatives” to BW, my goal here is to illustrate what that influence might look like: how corequisite courses, initially meant as a “middle ground” between BW and mainstream courses, could potentially upend expectations of course offerings and support student agency *when combined with DSP*.

The Symbiotic Relationship Between DSP and Corequisites at RIC

At RIC, the simultaneous introduction of DSP and a corequisite course has helped foster the very “creative and effective course structure alternatives” to which Lalicker alludes. But though Lalicker seems to suggest a kind of linear trajectory in his discussion of DSP and corequisites—first the implementation of DSP, then the creation of corequisite options—such was not the case at our institution. The near-simultaneous piloting of DSP and our corequisite course meant that each changed the other: how DSP is enacted depends on the courses, corequisites included, that the FYW Program offers; how those courses evolve and serve is dependent upon how moderators and documents alike frame them in DSP sessions at Orientation as well as each student’s rationale for selecting a course. My colleagues and I have created the spectrum of courses that our community of faculty, staff, students, and administrators felt were necessary, and we invite students to choose among those courses. We see the scaffolding of agency at two points of contact—choice among courses, choice of courses—to be critical to the philosophy of student empowerment embraced by both DSP and corequisites. For those Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) who advocate such a philosophy,

it seems that RIC’s story is particularly relevant, though not perfect. When *all* students get to choose *any* course, the tracking, sorting, and stigma often associated with more traditional placement methods (writing placement exams, standardized tests) and more traditional course trajectories (basic writing-to-mainstream course) begin to fade.

RIC offers four courses under the FYW Program umbrella; Table 1 articulates some distinguishing features among the choices (more on how the Program describes the courses to students, below) and might prove a helpful referent as readers progress through the descriptions.

Table 1. Courses under the FYW Program Umbrella

Name of Course	# of Credits	Do all credits “count” towards graduation totals?
FYW 010: College Writing Strategies	4	No; none count
FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing	4	Yes
FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing PLUS	6	Yes
FYW 100H: Introduction to Academic Writing Honors	4	Yes

Originally, 100Plus was conceived as a hybrid between what was, at the time, our pre-requisite, pre-credit course, “FYW 010: College Writing Strategies” (formerly ENGL 010), and our traditional, long-standing credit-bearing course, “FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing.” Students who enroll in our pre-credit course, FYW 010 (graded on a pass/fail basis), still must continue on to FYW 100, 100Plus, or 100Honors and successfully complete one of those courses with a grade of “C” or higher in order to fulfill our College Writing Requirement. It was clear to me the first few times

I taught FYW 010—prior to the piloting of FYW 100Plus—that there were students enrolled who did not “need” the two-semester sequence of FYW 010/FYW 100 but who might struggle if placed directly in the credit-bearing, four-credit course, FYW 100. (In the early stages of the DSP pilot, which began in 2012, students were still being placed, for all intents and purposes, by SAT/ACT scores and, for students below the cutoff scores, by a Writing Placement Exam. See Caouette and Griggs for a discussion of the early phases of our multi-year DSP pilot.) FYW 100Plus was piloted as a mashup of FYW 010 and FYW 100, but I somehow—through a combination of the trust of administrators, the support of some powerful campus allies, the invocation of existing corequisite research, the courage of several FYW instructors, and the willingness to fail—convinced administration to allow all six 100Plus credits to “count” towards graduation totals. In its original conception, then, 100Plus was a traditional corequisite course, intended to “accelerate” the BW student towards graduation by requiring fewer semesters of first-year writing instruction even as it was unlike other corequisite courses in its offering of full college credit. This latter point, combined with DSP, significantly affected how the course evolved.

Combining DSP and Corequisites: Institutional Implications

It would be disingenuous of me not to acknowledge the effect of granting full credit for FYW 100Plus. The concept of granting credit for “remedial” writing courses has long been an area of advocacy for Writing Program Administrators (WPAs). WPAs can attest to the powerful effects and ethical necessity of offering credit for all writing classes, regardless of student preparedness at each level (most notably for our purposes, see Glau’s discussion of the “stretch” model; see also Mary Soliday’s oft-cited discussion of mainstreaming). Indeed, current corequisite models are modern-day solutions to a problem that has existed almost since the inception of the first-year writing requirement: how to award students credit for college-level work—work done *in college*—when the institution does not believe the work to be truly “college-level.” And yet, absent the awarding of full credit, corequisites risk perpetuating the same stigma that BW students have long faced: students who need more resources (of time, of space, of instruction) must sacrifice institutional capital in order to move forward. Institutions and now, increasingly, state legislators have weighed in (and legislated) with policies concerning the presence and legitimacy of “remedial” courses at the post-secondary level. While a comprehensive review of this national movement

is beyond the scope of my article, and RIC was not legislatively compelled to scale down its “remedial” curriculum, offering FYW 100Plus as a six-credit, entirely credit-bearing course reflects programmatic, institutional, and legislative awareness of the problems associated with and caused by *requiring* non-credit “remedial” coursework.

Such conversations about the ethics of required non-credit-bearing remedial courses motivated me to reimagine first-year placement and curriculum; the subsequent adoption of the FYW 100Plus course *and* implementation of DSP significantly altered RIC’s understanding of the spectrum of available writing courses, new and old. At RIC, 100Plus has become “just another” FYW course in which students could enroll. No one is asked to do additional work without commensurate compensation—not students, not faculty. I recognized that the awarding of graduation credit conveys institutional legitimacy for faculty, students, parents, and administrators; that message had a significant role in shaping how I presented FYW 100Plus—and how stakeholders responded to the course. Consequently, my original concept of 100Plus as FYW 010 and FYW 100 blended together in a binary soup was replaced with the concept of 100Plus as its own course, as a different route to the same outcomes.

The presence of our corequisite course tells only part of the story. Without DSP and the opportunity to *choose* 100Plus (or not), the six-credit FYW course might have proven onerous to students had they been compelled by more traditional placement methods (writing placement exam, standardized test scores, etc.) to enroll in the course; indeed, given our student population’s work and home responsibilities, the one-semester six-credit FYW 100Plus course (which meets three days a week) might have been perceived as more of a “punishment” for underprepared writers than a two-semester BW/mainstream sequence. In the absence of DSP, students placed by others into 100Plus would have clearly been signaled as “not ready” (or—worse—“not good enough”) for FYW 100. The presence of DSP short-circuited that resentment—no one was obligated to enroll in 100Plus. But *anyone* might: in the fall 2018 semester, over 11% of first-year writing students chose FYW 100Plus.

In giving students a choice *among* courses and a choice *of* courses, the FYW Program created an opportunity for sincere inquiry into how students sequence themselves in and out of first-year writing. This profoundly affects how the Program describes, populates, advertises, and teaches *all of its courses*, as the discussion below will illustrate. In fact, I will go so far as to say that there is the potential to destigmatize BW at Rhode Island College.

Instead, students can choose to fulfill their College Writing Requirement six different ways:

- a two-semester sequence of ten credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100Plus
- a two-semester sequence of eight credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100
- a two-semester sequence of eight credits: FYW 010 and FYW 100Honors
- one semester of six credits: FYW 100Plus
- one semester of four credits: FYW 100
- one semester of four credits: FYW 100Honors

I am convinced that this would not have been possible without both 100Plus and DSP, together. Because of DSP, the FYW Program at RIC has worked hard to disrupt the role of gatekeepers (see Shor) for its students. No one course need be privileged over another; no one path is preferred on the journey to meeting the College Writing Requirement.

Whether one sees these dual-pilot beginnings as steeped in naiveté and inexperience, as clear evidence of a lack of forethought, or as brilliance in disguise, the absence of strict guidelines, rules, or expectations was in many ways liberating for FYW faculty and administrators. Participants saw these two initiatives as “pilots” in the most non-binding way. If the DSP pilot proved unsuccessful, the Program would return to its previous placement method. If the 100Plus pilot proved unsuccessful, the Program would just stop running the course; in the pilot phase, 100Plus was not a permanent part of the curriculum. The risks and inconvenience were minimal, the rewards potentially significant. My goal was to explore any ways I could improve our FYW Program so as to better serve RIC students.

Perhaps the most important implication is that these two initiatives have disrupted efforts to sort students based on institutional-centered criteria (i.e., the aforementioned cutoff scores for SATs and the required Writing Placement Exam), which often left students—particularly those placed in FYW 010—feeling excluded from the process; the criteria now originate with the students themselves, since they choose any of our four courses and six combination options based on their own reasoning. Less relevant than who enrolls in which course are the reasons *why* students make their choices. A student who is concerned about elevating their GPA to meet the admission criteria for a competitive program might appreciate the additional opportunities that a six-credit course would yield (again, see Chemishanova and Snead for an example of unanticipated student populations in their *PlusOne*

program). A student who was home-schooled or a returning student who is uncertain of their ability to adapt to a traditional classroom setting might opt for a two-semester sequence as a means of institutional integration. A student who seeks a more challenging curriculum could express interest in the Honors Program and FYW 100Honors. I can't imagine a "wrong" reason for students to be in any one FYW course. When I am asked "What kind of student enrolls in FYW 010/100/P/H?", one response to the query is "all sorts of students." Quite possibly the more compelling answer is: "Anyone who wants to."

Effects on Program- and College-Wide Investment in Writing Instruction. In spring of 2017 DSP officially was adopted as RIC's FYW placement method; FYW 100Plus was signed into curriculum in spring 2014 and moved out of the pilot phase for fall 2014. Because the pilot beginnings were near-simultaneous, it has been difficult to measure either pilot's success in calculable ways; this is complicated by the fact that the college has renewed its commitment to "student success" (with focus on the first-year experience) in recent years, making it difficult to determine beyond fairly robust FYW 100Plus enrollment, particularly in the fall, what precise factors influence metrics such as retention, persistence, grades, graduation rates, and pass rates in WID courses.

Still, there are a number of early indications that these two pilots have contributed positively to student experiences. The FYW Program now has access to incoming students at every Orientation session; put another way, the FYW Program is a part of a student's earliest introductions to Rhode Island College. My colleagues and I have been given space, time, and resources to talk about placement and about the differences among our four courses, including the prerequisite; previously, students only heard about FYW through a mass mailing and, for many, the Writing Placement Exam proctored *before* Orientation (students were notified via mail of exam scores; our enrollment software blocked students from enrolling in any course outside those determined by the exam). I have met with Orientation leadership and staff to share ideas and collaborate on how best to serve students in the FYW Program. Students, faculty, and staff are *talking about writing* at Orientation—about the FYW courses, about student preparedness, and about what it means to write at RIC. These conversations begin at a student's Orientation and progress through the first week of the chosen FYW course; they then continue for every semester a student is enrolled in a FYW course. Like others who have adopted DSP (again, see Royer and Gilles *Principles and Practices*), I appreciate this opportunity to be part of the college conversation. And,

like those who have instituted corequisites, I appreciate the opportunity to disrupt the easy sorting of students into binaries (BW or mainstream) and prefer, instead, to have a conversation with them.

In addition, all instructors in the FYW Program are now part of the DSP process. Previous to DSP, a handful of FYW instructors would meet to read and score the Writing Placement Exams. This rendered the placement process largely invisible to most FYW faculty. Now, each instructor is asked to review the DSP process, including course descriptions, with students. While the assignment of writing samples early on in the semester was not uncommon among some RIC instructors, I have codified the practice and tied such assignments to the placement method; thus, students and instructors can continue the placement conversation begun during Orientation. Instructors can start the semester knowing why students chose the course they did—their histories, their aspirations, and their concerns. And students can have a better sense of instructor expectations.

Finally, I am confident in my decision to make student choice a cornerstone of the FYW programmatic philosophy. As a WPA, I will say that adopting these two initiatives has affected how I frame other positions and decisions at RIC. I have also found myself more vocal about policies that seem to remove, silence, or discourage student voices and input. In essence, by thinking about student agency in these two initiatives, I've become more attuned to other possible avenues for integrating student choice.

Effects on Scheduling and Registration. I am pleased with the accomplishments attributed to these pilots (both the imagined and unanticipated), but there continue to be administrative challenges that will be familiar to readers who have adopted DSP or corequisite models and which, again, are articulated in the respective literature on DSP and corequisites. I would argue, however, that familiar WPA tasks such as scheduling and registration are uniquely complicated in programs that have adopted both initiatives; indeed, the interdependence of DSP and corequisites have only compounded these challenges at RIC.

Scheduling continues to vex me; I adjust the number and kinds of course offerings based on past patterns and try to respond to demand with staffing, scheduling, and space. I work hard to make sure that there are “enough” sections of each course to meet needs. I have had to phase out FYW 010 in the spring semester because of low enrollment, and the fall 2018 numbers were low, too (see below). Students who genuinely want that course might be at a disservice, and I am working to find solutions. I also worry that students who feel compelled to enroll in FYW their fall semester—despite

reminders that FYW must be taken the first *year*, not necessarily the first semester—might choose any open seat in any of the four courses instead of waiting for a seat in the most appropriate course, even if that means waiting until spring.

Students who enter in the fall but register for spring FYW courses are rather far away from the sunny May and June days of their New Student Orientation—registration for spring courses begins in late October and carries through the beginning of the spring semester. It's possible that students have forgotten their DSP session, details about choosing a FYW course, or even the distinction among the four courses. Moreover, it's possible that the course they chose during Orientation no longer best meets their needs after a semester of college. Perhaps the student realizes that they are more underprepared for college writing than they initially thought; perhaps they realize just the opposite. For me, asking students to revisit or recall their DSP process prior to spring registration seems a solution in line with the Program's placement philosophy, and I am working with student services to better communicate with spring FYW students in this way.

Effects on FYW 010. Not entirely surprisingly, and as alluded to above, the number of FYW 010 sections offered annually has decreased—due to the option of FYW 100Plus, due to DSP as a placement method and, more recently, due to the offer of free tuition (with some restrictions) for two years at our state's community college. I don't necessarily see this as problematic; it's possible that students find what they need in the other three FYW course offerings (or at the community college). The adoption of both DSP and FYW 100Plus has led to a reexamination of *all the courses* under the FYW umbrella (more on FYW 100Honors, for example, below). Whereas I perhaps had been content to retain FYW 010 without question and as inevitable, the two initiatives have given me the confidence to reflect on the course and consider other models (including corequisites) that might serve this small but crucial self-selected FYW 010 population—after all, given other choices, some students still choose FYW 010, and I want to honor that group. Given the low enrollment in fall of 2018 (just nine students total over three sections), my colleagues and I are currently developing a proposal for a new course to replace FYW 010. The dean, who is committed to serving students who choose FYW 010, is open to the discussion.

While FYW 010 as a pre-credit, pre-requisite model might be eventually phased out, a new model may replace it. This new model might also be credit-bearing, and/or it might attract unanticipated populations, and/or it might serve the needs of students who feel as if there are no “best choices”

for them in the four courses now offered. The current enrollment decline of FYW 010 is an opportunity to reevaluate how the Program is or is not serving the needs of its students: do students generally feel that the FYW 010 does not meet their needs? Are there institutional factors such as credit load or scheduling patterns that heavily influence student decisions to opt in or out of FYW 010? Or are the numbers, however small, accurate in representing the students who truly find that FYW 010 is the best choice for them? I hope that more research, both from my own institution and others, will be forthcoming in identifying the spectrum of FYW courses that best meet student needs at the local level.

Indeed, perhaps one of the most unforeseen implications of these two pilots is that it has made my FYW colleagues and me bold in our experimentations; our program has modeled for the college the possibilities of significant curricular change at the first-year level. I don't want to suggest the FYW Program broke all the rules in creating 100Plus and offering DSP, but what I realized is that there weren't as many rules as I thought. Policies constraining adjunct faculty workloads, course credits, remedial coursework, and schedules were sometimes negotiated or, at the very least, clarified when questioned. While revisions to FYW 010 were not part of either the DSP or the FYW 100Plus pilots (we expected that 010 would co-exist), the effects of those intersecting pilots have caused a ripple throughout the program and have fundamentally changed how the program approaches revisions to curriculum and placement; in the final pages of this article, I discuss how that has also encouraged the FYW Program to think in terms of agency for all students—even those we don't generally consider when we talk about placement and corequisites.

Effects on Universal Access to Choice—All Students, All Courses. Because of our visible presence at Orientation, I am confident that most RIC students participate in DSP. The FYW Program continues to work with student services and Orientation organizers to find systematic ways to identify students who fall through the cracks—those who don't attend Orientation or who enroll late, for example. These students often choose courses “on the fly” or rely on under-informed advisors or peers to make decisions. Such students may not know that RIC offers four different courses, nor might they know where to access descriptions of those courses. I am fortunate that the student services office has been a key supporter and source of information throughout these pilots. I am optimistic that changes in institutional leadership and a renewed focus on long-overdue technological² improvements at RIC will help better serve *all* students.

Moreover, even those students determined to be more “proficient” writers might be unintentionally excluded from the DSP process and subliminally discouraged from selecting courses that might better speak to their academic needs. One such group consists of students who transfer in FYW credit from other institutions; another is those students who transfer in standardized test credit (like CLEP or AP). Our institution does offer Transfer and New Student Orientations in January. And in all our DSP sessions and handouts, moderators provide information on some of the more common pathways for the transfer of first-year writing credit into RIC. The benefits of, drawbacks to, and complications (to students, to courses, to programs, to institutions) in awarding transfer credit is a larger national conversation (for a comprehensive treatment of dual credit and concurrent enrollment programs, see Hansen and Farris’s edited collection). My point here is that students who transfer in credit might benefit from additional writing instruction but might not participate—either by choice or because of the absence of inclusive rhetoric—in DSP. Therefore, they might not take note of a beneficial FYW course. I have had students with transfer credit from AP exams express real interest in FYW 100Plus. While I still ask all students to participate in the DSP process regardless of what they bring to RIC (that is, all students at New Student Orientation attend the DSP session even if, for example, they bring in AP credit), how seriously they do so is hard to gauge. As the Program revises its DSP questionnaire (see below), I seek to be more inclusive of this population of students even as I anticipate that many students with transfer FYW credit will not opt to enroll in one of RIC’s FYW courses. The point here is to offer them the choice.

Then, too, those students admitted into the College Honors Program generally enroll in Honors-designated FYW³. These students meet with the Director of the Honors Program for targeted advising during Orientation. Requirements for receiving “College Honors” upon graduation include completion of five General Education Honors-designated courses. FYW 100Honors is one of the most convenient courses to help fulfill that requirement, and many students in the Honors Program may take that course instead of considering other FYW options via invested participation in DSP. However, just as with students who transfer in FYW credit, Honors students in effect are excluded from the DSP process. For several cycles of New Student Orientation, the FYW 100Honors checkbox on our DSP handout has been a default option for Honors students, a kind of afterthought: if you’re in the Honors Program or are interested in enrolling in the Honors Program, take this course. Truly, that has been the extent of the “description” of the course.

Last year, however, my colleagues and I revised the DSP Questionnaire largely due to concerns regarding validity (see Ruggles Gere et al.). As the FYW Program's placement process and courses have evolved, and as that same program has adopted revised outcomes, I have come to realize that the previous questionnaire no longer reflects the kinds of FYW courses offered at RIC. In the revision, my colleagues and I sought to posit the FYW 100Honors course as a *choice*, just as the three other FYW courses are posited as such. We described the features that make the course unique among the four, and in this way, we created a course option for students who might seek a more challenging first-year writing experience. And, because the Honors Program sees FYW 100Honors not only as a course for Honors students but also as a potential recruitment space for those students who are interested in Honors and/or a more challenging curriculum, the course can become a choice for all students—not just those in the Honors Program. I anticipated none of this when I embarked on these dual pilots, but I am pleased with the way in which the pilots have revealed yet another population of students whom the FYW Program might better serve.

Indeed, such opportunities continue to reveal themselves. For illustrative purposes, I've included our (clearly outdated) course descriptions in the Appendix to show how exclusionary rhetoric can permeate multiple layers of a writing program. The moderators did not use these descriptions at this year's Orientation DSP session but, though the document's revision is on my to-do list, it still resides on the FYW Program website. In the appended document, it's clear that I am establishing FYW 100 as the default or "mainstream" course and comparing the other three courses in relation to it. While I offer the most sections of FYW 100, and that course is chosen by the vast majority of our incoming students, the representation of FYW100 as default completely undermines the purpose of DSP sessions and corequisite models with rhetoric that subverts choice, however subliminally. This is a particularly glaring oversight in that over 18% of fall 2018 first-year students *did not* choose FYW 100 (1.5% enrolled in FYW 010; 11.5% enrolled in FYW 100Plus; and more than 5% enrolled in FYW 100Honors). This is yet another example as to how these two initiatives have changed, and continue to change, the way I think about placement, the curriculum, and student agency.

Conclusion

It is the policy of the FYW Program at RIC to invite *all* students to participate in DSP as a means to locate the course or sequence of courses,

including corequisites, which each student believes will best serve them. The FYW Program's policy implementation is not perfect and, despite the post-pilot status, I continue to identify areas of inconsistent messaging, poor delivery, and programmatic interference with student choice. The FYW Program also sees further opportunities to refine its DSP process and to consider other FYW courses that students might need at the pre-credit, corequisite, "mainstream," or Honors level. For example, I seek to collaborate more meaningfully with RIC's multilingual (L2) programs; I think it's a real possibility that some students might choose L2-specific sections of FYW (see, for example, Ruecker).

I believe my colleagues and I have created an important precedent for innovation and choice in our program and at our institution, but I acknowledge that there is still a great deal of work to be done. I recognize the need for further local and generalizable research on this approach. (Despite the tongue-in-cheek beginning of this article, my colleagues and I do work to create thoughtful, responsive programmatic assessment). In the end, while the past twenty years have produced a growing corpus of research and scholarship on DSP and corequisites *separately*, the same cannot be said of investigations into the marrying of these two initiatives. The need for further research seems particularly timely as colleges and universities expand corequisite offerings and consider DSP and other choice-based placement methods.

Our aspirations for student agency find inspiration in Ritter's pivotal monograph on BW at Yale and Harvard; in her final pages she writes,

Imagine, if you will, a first-year program at Equitable University that looks like this: A first-year writing curriculum with a menu of course options for incoming (and transfer) students, each with equal course credit, each with a small course capacity... and each with a simple, objective name. . . . Each course is regarded publicly. . . as college-level, and incoming students are encouraged to choose, through a process of guided self-placement, which course along the sequence best meets their initial needs. No student is called remedial or basic and certainly not precollege (they *have* been admitted, after all, to the university). (Ritter 140-41; emphasis in original)

I'll not pretend that the FYW Program at RIC has achieved this ideal in the destigmatizing of BW students simply by offering corequisites, or that the placement method is transparent in its invitation to all students; the preced-

ing pages make clear that RIC has yet to achieve that goal. But like Ritter, I imagine such a place as Equitable University, and I believe that the work done at Rhode Island College to honor student choice in writing placement is a step towards making the imaginary a reality.

Notes

1. Here I draw upon a long scholarly tradition concerning the role of BW courses and the stigma of remediation in the post-secondary classroom; in particular, I wish to acknowledge my debt to robust conversations marking the end of the previous century and the beginning of this one. The citations are too numerous to list here (though several cited from *JBW* show this journal's key influence), but I hope their impact on our programmatic goals—to support, welcome, and validate all writers—can be seen in the pages of this article.
2. While RIC has a dedicated group of administrators and staff in the technological support systems, that area of the college has been under-resourced in the past. Recently, the FYW Program moved to an online process for our DSP sessions. However, the program used is not adopted by the whole college (Web Services knew about the program; User Support Services did not). Still, an online form is a step in the right direction; in the future, students, support services, and faculty advisors might access evidence of student DSP choices, prompt students with timely reminders, and even block FYW enrollment until DSP questionnaires are completed. Those students seeking to enroll in the spring semester might be asked over intersession to revisit their DSP choices. I acknowledge that the technological difficulties seem in some ways archaic, but nevertheless, in this institutional context, they are very real. And I see these not as difficulties with RIC's placement method but rather with the delivery, though I recognize the two are linked.
3. Many thanks to Moira Collins, former FYW Program adjunct faculty member, for noting this disservice to Honors students early on in our DSP pilot process.

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APPENDIX

Below are the descriptions of FYW courses previously included in RIC's DSP packet; see discussion, above, about how DSP and FYW 100Plus have inspired the FYW Program to rethink how it describes these courses in relation to each other.

- **FYW 010: College Writing Strategies** (*formerly ENGL 010: Basic Writing*)

FYW 010: College Writing Strategies is a writing course designed for students who are not yet ready to take FYW 100 or FYW 100P and who may need a little more time to write as well as more individualized feedback on their writing. Students are required to meet with a Writing Center tutor at least three times over the course of the semester. Students who successfully complete FYW 010 will enroll in FYW 100 the following semester; FYW 010 alone does not meet the College Writing Requirement. While FYW 010 is a four-credit course, those credit hours do not count towards graduation or towards a student's GPA; they do count towards a student's full-time status. The course is graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grading scale. Enrollment is capped at 10 students.

- **FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing PLUS**

FYW 100P: Introduction to Academic Writing Plus is a writing course designed for students who are not yet ready for the demands of FYW 100 but who feel that they might not need two semesters of first-year writing instruction (as the FYW 010/FYW 100 sequence would provide). Students who successfully earn a grade of "C" or higher in FYW 100P have completed the College Writing Requirement (please note that there may be other requirements based on intended majors; check with your advisor for more details). FYW 100P meets the same outcomes as FYW 100 (below), but allows students a bit more time and interaction with their instructor. Approximately one meeting day per week will be spent in a computer classroom and with a Writing Center tutor. FYW 100P is a six-credit course that meets three times a week; it is graded on a traditional (4.0) scale. Enrollment is capped at 15 students.

- **FYW 100: Introduction to Academic Writing** (*formerly WRTG 100*)

FYW 100, Introduction to Academic Writing, is a writing course that introduces students to the conventions and expectations of academic writing—that is, the kinds of writing they will be expected to do in college as well as in their subsequent careers (and lives). Students who successfully complete FYW 100 with a grade of “C” or higher have completed the College Writing Requirement (please note that there may be other requirements based on intended majors; check with your advisor for more details). FYW 100 is a four-credit course that is graded on a traditional (4.0) grading scale. Enrollment is capped at 20 students.

- **FYW 100H: Introduction to Academic Writing HONORS**

This course is a FYW course specifically designed for students in the Honors Program. For questions about the program, please contact Dr. Rebecca Sparks, Director, at rsparks@ric.edu.

Designing Rubrics to Foster Students' Diverse Language Backgrounds

Amanda Athon

ABSTRACT: Scholars such as Diane Kelly-Riley and Patricia Bizzell have argued that the student writing feature most likely to place a student into a basic writing course is the presence of dialect other than standard academic English. This essay examines how assessment practices can foster students' diverse languages rather than inhibit them. I conducted a semester-long participant observation of two sections of first-year writing at Midwestern University, also considered basic writing preparatory courses, in order to examine how instructors assess varieties of English. One of these sections exclusively enrolled nonnative speakers of English; the other section enrolled both native and nonnative speakers. A key finding is that students modeled the vocabulary they used to discuss their writing and the writing of their peers to match the assessment language used by the program. Composition scholarship recognizes that language difference and variation is intrinsic to all language, thus, programs should take care to consider issues of language diversity when designing rubrics or other assessment tools to avoid unfairly penalizing students. I discuss one possible model for increased attention to language diversity in assessment.

KEYWORDS: assessment; basic writing; language diversity; rubrics

The privileging of academic English has the potential to create unfair assessment practices for nonnative speakers and speakers of “nonstandard” language varieties. Scholars such as Diane Kelly-Riley and Patricia Bizzell have argued that the student writing feature most likely to place a student into a basic writing course is the presence of a language variety other than standard academic English. Other studies, such as those by Ed White and also Arnetha Ball’s research in African American Vernacular, have shown that assessors may grade students who write in a so-called nonstandard language variety more harshly than their peers. Rubrics may emphasize this myth of a standard correctness. For these reasons, I argue that collaborative assessment practices at the classroom level—rubrics, in particular—may help to avoid unfairly penalizing those students whose home dialects most diverge

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from standard academic English. By involving students in the assessment process, writing faculty can develop assessment tools that assist students in understanding instructor feedback and the rhetorical nature of writing, as well as enabling student agency and ownership of language. Many current rubrics, such as the one used by the research site in this study, insufficiently account for the diversity inherent in language. Other, more collaborative assessment methods that focus on the process of writing rather than only its product, can help foster language diversity in the writing classroom. In this article, I discuss some possible take-aways for designing more equitable classroom-based assessment tools.

In her collection on racism and writing centers, Laura Greenfield argues that notions of standard English are racialized, and points out that even scholars who advocate for language diversity make the mistake of discussing standard English as a variety of English separate from those considered “diverse.” She writes that, “The only standard languages—languages with finite boundaries and comprehensively accountable features—are dead languages” (39), and explains that we too often refer to language diversity as dialects exclusive to people of color. In fact, she argues, standard English is an abstraction and difficult to define as a language variety because it tends to borrow from other varieties. Using it as a euphemism for “white English” leads to the assumption that white students who are not proficient writers are merely sloppy proofreaders, while students of color who make similar errors are considered deficient writers.

Similarly, Asao B. Inoue explains in his book *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies* the need for deliberate strategies to counter the racialized norms of so-called standard English in the composition classroom. He discusses his use of grading contracts in his first-year composition courses where the letter grade values labor over any single writing product. Students, regardless of writing ability, must regularly attend class and complete all assignments to earn a high grade. By acknowledging the labor of writing as the act of learning—rather than a single essay privileging a white language variety—Inoue argues that we can lessen assimilation to a dominant discourse. For example, in Inoue’s courses, a higher grade reflects that the student missed fewer classes and turned in more revisions. In this way, grading contracts as an assessment tool help to ensure that students who are less proficient in academic English are not at an unfair advantage, and as Inoue notes, higher grades are more available to all students (191). Since assessment of writing is typically where students of color are unfairly penalized

in a composition course (Ball; Kelly-Riley; Smitherman), more attention is needed to the tools and strategies we use.

Acknowledging the context and purpose of writing in all stages of the writing process may help make the assessment of writing more transparent and valuable for students. This is a position advocated by the Conference on College Composition and Communication in its landmark position statement “Students’ Rights to Their Own Language,” a document that asserts dialects are not errors of language, but sophisticated language patterns that are subject to discrimination in the classroom and beyond. Boldly stating that advocating a standard dialect equates to “immoral advice for humans,” the statement calls for faculty to honor the languages of students from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds. (For the purposes of this essay, academic English is used to refer to the “typical” language variety taught in a first-year composition classroom.) Since language variation is inherent to the nature of discourse, assessment practices should focus less on a single definition of “correctness” and instead explore the process-based nature of writing; and toward this end, assessment tools, such as rubrics, should continue to move toward a focus on process and, as Inoue stated, labor rather than product. My findings, described later in this essay, support Inoue’s conclusions that in addition to lessening the idea of one single correctness, framing assessment as process-based may help students understand the rhetorical nature of writing and assessment.

Methodology and Methods

Previous research in the teaching of basic writing indicates that the students enrolled in basic writing courses are more likely to use a variety of language dialects (Bizzell; Kelly-Riley). In order to understand students’ attitudes toward the assessment process in relation to language variety usage, I observed two basic writing courses at my institution, Midwestern University (MU). One of the courses I studied was designed for native speaking students and the other was designated for nonnative speakers of English. Both groups of students are likely to exhibit so-called nonstandard dialects of English.

To begin, I queried basic writing instructors via email seeking faculty participants and received two affirmative responses. I then met with both of these instructors to further discuss my plans to observe their courses for one academic semester and survey their students periodically during the observation to learn more about writing assessment and language diversity. Based on my review of literature, the course outcomes, and the structure

of the writing program (including an already in-place universal rubric and portfolio exit system), I arrived at the following research questions:

- In what ways can instructors use collaborative assessment practices to foster our students' diverse languages?
- How do our rubrics consider the diverse language backgrounds of students enrolled in basic writing courses?
- What does sentence-level "correctness" in college level composition mean to students and instructors?

In "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research," Gesa E. Kirsch and Joy S. Ritchie state, "researchers need to acknowledge the way race (and for most composition scholars this means examining their whiteness), social class, and other circumstances have structured their own thinking and how that, in turn, has shaped their own questions and interpretations" (10). Feminist methodology inspired my own approach to data collection; I wanted to involve participants in the process and value their contributions to my research in this study. To this end, I created a research web site and corresponding blog where all participants could review in-progress data and leave comments or feedback. While I encouraged students to approach me directly since I regularly attended their class sessions, I knew that an anonymous method of contact might encourage participation. By inviting my participants to review and respond to data throughout the semester via this research website and blog, I hoped to create a sense of equity between researcher and participant and also expose any personal bias.

In addition to observing and taking notes on both courses for one semester, I also conducted pre- and post-semester instructor interviews, surveyed all students twice throughout the course, and routinely performed textual analysis by collecting any classroom artifacts such as syllabi, assignment sheets, and the program's first-year writing rubric. I used an on-going, grounded theory approach to coding to provide findings to my research questions. I began to work with my data immediately, coding major discussions of class sessions according to general topics (such as thesis statements, library research, etc.) and examining the frequency of each topic. This allowed me to determine what and how often general writing topics were covered in each session and how many class sessions discussed the assessment process.

I'll discuss my methods of data collection in greater detail:

Collecting Artifacts. Throughout the semester, I gathered various textual data from the course. I collected a copy of any sheet or handout given to students such as topic proposal worksheets, essay and short writing assignments, peer review guides, or other overviews of writing activities in order to see how these influenced student perceptions regarding the rubric or assessment. Artifacts typically fell into one of three categories: assignment requirements (to unpack the assignment), pre- or post-writing activities, or student modeling.

Observing Classrooms/ Building Rapport. During the study, I regularly attended class sessions to learn more about both the native and nonnative speaking sections. I observed two sections, one taught by a lecturer named "Kay" and another section taught by a graduate student named "May." (I discuss these participants later in this essay.) I kept a journal of my classroom observation notes and regularly posted these notes to my research blog, viewable by students and course instructors. Not only did these class sessions provide valuable data that revealed more about each instructor's individual approaches to writing pedagogy, the sessions helped me build a rapport with students and invite them to participate more directly in my research. For example, one post to my research blog asked students to assist me in creating the participant and university pseudonyms, which students then voted on and selected. Here is an excerpt:

What's in a Name?

Any research project involving "human subjects" must be approved by that university's Internal Review Board (IRB). One of the requirements for my project is that I keep your personal identities a secret – I can't use your real names. Due to this, I won't be naming the university you attend, either. This means that I'll need to create a pseudonym and I'd love your help with this. What would you call the university if you could name it something else? If you have an idea, send me an email [embedded hotlink to address] and then let's vote to decide. The name we choose will go in my final research project.

I took detailed notes on classroom sessions and coded the notes into categories to learn more about the frequency and patterns of major activities in both sections. For example, Kay's section—whose students were exclu-

sively nonnative speakers—including more attention to grammar and syntax, while May's section focused more on brainstorming and prewriting activities. The categories for coding classroom sessions closely aligned to the categories of the writing program's rubric, such as development, organization, and grammar. I included an additional category for any discussion of assessment.

Surveying Students. In her book on teacher research, Ruth E. Ray writes that “students are not merely subjects whom the teacher-researcher instructs and assesses; they are co-researchers, sources of knowledge whose insights help provide new directions for the study” (175). In this sense, student responses helped to shape the course of my study and as a comparison for my personal observations. Anonymous online student surveys were another means of gathering student input. I chose to create online surveys for ease of student access and so that I could more easily view patterns within responses. These surveys were given at midterms and at finals during the Fall 2012 academic semester. I asked about students' demographics and also general thoughts on the assessment process, for example, “How did the rubric help you revise your writing?” I hoped to learn more about students' writing values and whether or not those aligned with what was being assessed in their writing. In other words, students could reflect on the tension between home language and academic writing. Surveys allowed me to gain valuable information without having students sacrifice their privacy as they were able to view results of the surveys and provide any feedback or clarifications. However, to fully protect students' anonymity, some survey results were not posted until after the course had ended.

Conducting Interviews. I interviewed instructors in a face-to-face setting near midterms and at the end the term and periodically followed up with emails to see if there were any questions or comments that the instructors wanted to add to my data collection. Thus, while there were only two “formal” interviews, we met often informally during office hours to discuss the course and my in-progress research. The formal interviews ranged from ten minutes to thirty minutes and were conducted in each instructor's office. I began the study wanting to learn about what each instructor valued in the writing classroom, and as the semester progressed, I became more interested in how the values of the writing program (again, the university used a mandatory, standard rubric for each essay) affected each instructor's pedagogy. As I previously stated, participants had the opportunity to review all survey data, transcripts, and my written summaries of findings.

Research Site: Basic Writing Instruction at Midwestern University

Midwestern University is located in a rural Ohio town with a population of approximately 30,000. Founded in 1910 as a teachers' college, the campus is relatively large at 1,400 acres. The school offers bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. During the 2011 – 2012 school year, 13,814 undergraduate students were enrolled along with 1,269 graduate students. Nearly 12,000 of the undergraduate students were in-state residents ("FTE Enrollment by Campus"). MU's writing program is a well-established unit, and at the time of this study, operated as a department separate from the university's English department. Its major driving force in assessment is the program's rubric and portfolio system that requires students to pass two of five essays in order to pass the course; students produce two drafts of each essay. Students are introduced to the rubric and portfolio system when they purchase their required course packet containing five blank rubrics (one for each essay), five topic proposal sheets, and a welcome letter from the WPA. Students must also pass the end-of-the-semester portfolio review to pass the course. Portfolios are reviewed by faculty other than the course instructor, so it is possible for a student with two passing essays to fail the course.

All students are required to take FYW, but may instead receive an exemption through a placement test or by transferring credit from a similar course at another institution. In most cases, students entering the university as first-years take the entrance exam to determine placement into one of three courses: 1100, the basic writing course, 1110, the intermediate course that most students are placed into, or 1120, the final course in the sequence and the only course that is credit-bearing. The online placement exam consists of an essay prompt where students have 24-hours to draft, revise, and submit. These placement exams are evaluated by graduate assistants with a final review by a full-time composition instructor. In this way, the assessment practices undergo intensive norming with the program's universal rubric as the primary assessment tool.

The exception to this placement requirement is for non-US citizens, who must take the writing exam in-person, the week before the semester begins; this would apply to most students in Kay's section. Students whose first language is not English must take a special section of 1100, denoted as 1100W, that enrolls only nonnative speakers—this section is one of the two 1100 courses observed in this study, taught by Kay. Although this course

typically enrolls only international students, other students whose first language is not English are permitted to enroll in the course.

Students designated as underprepared writers are placed into 1100, the course that I studied. This course is similar to the other writing courses at MU in that they also have a course cap of 15, students draft and revise five essays before submitting a final portfolio of work, and students receive a grade of "Pass" or "No Pass." The course outcomes, however, are broad. These include selecting and narrowing topics that engage and have meaning for both writer and audience, incorporating references to source material as a means of adding voice through writing to a larger conversation, producing, revisiting, and revising multiple drafts of a project, using citation effectively, developing confidence speaking about writing, writing to a variety of audiences, writing with a variety of purposes and genres, and writing across modalities ("First Year Writing"). There are more goals for 1100 than either of the upper-level courses, with a greater focus on understanding the writing process itself. Thus, although this is a preparatory course, students must demonstrate a mastery over more material.

While there is no set definition for what constitutes a basic writing course, Mina Shaughnessy defined it as "the teaching of writing to severely unprepared freshmen"; in his 1987 essay "Basic Writing, Basic Skills, Basic Research," Joseph Trimmer notes that most basic writing courses offered no college credit and perhaps overly focus on grammatical skills (5). Based on these categorizations of what defines basic writing, MU's 1100 is a basic writing course. Still, the term is somewhat arbitrary since student standards are based on the local context of an institution. So, while MU does not specifically designate this course as basic writing based on its purpose, it serves what writing instructors and the institution refer to as a basic writing function. As Trimmer's quote suggests, and besides the course's broad rhetorical goals, there is greater attention to sentence-level writing instruction in 1100, with many instructors using a sentence-combining workbook as a required text. This dichotomy made 1100W a fit site for research on rubrics' impact on students' perceptions of their writing development.

Student Participants in 1100W and FYW1100. According to material collected by the university admissions office of the research site, most students enroll in first-year writing directly out of high school. The campus has a predominantly middle-class, white student population, with twenty percent of the student population identifying as ethnic or cultural minorities. Although all states are represented in the student body, most at the university are from surrounding working-class towns. In her 1999 article for *Journal of Basic Writ-*

ing, “Just Writing, Basically,” Linda Adler-Kassner discovered much about basic writers by surveying 16 randomly chosen basic writing students at the University of Michigan-Detroit, inquiring why they felt they were enrolled in basic writing courses. Adler-Kassner found that, similar to students at MU, most of the basic writing students were from working-class backgrounds and lived near the university. Her student participants responded that they struggled with grammar, but also that their ideas did not translate well to the page (76 – 79). Thus, development, while important to all writers, is an especially important concern for basic writing students such as those who had enrolled in May’s course. Like the majority of students in MU’s writing program, the students in May’s course were recent high school graduates enrolled in degree-seeking programs, and from groups historically more likely to write in nonstandard dialects (Bizzell). May’s students mostly identified English as their home language, with one student identifying as a Nigerian second-language writer but not specifying his home language.



Figure 1. Student Desks, May’s Course.

Students in Kay’s section, as noted, were mostly international students and spoke home languages of Japanese, Farsi, Arabic, Chinese, and Hindi. Students who enrolled in the university through the international program were required to take this specific section and could not enroll in the native-speakers course, although some self-identified non-native English speakers enrolled as well. Obviously, these students differed from May’s students in that many of them had previously lived abroad prior to attending MU. Nearly all lived on campus, unlike the largely commuting population of May’s course. Data from this study, confirmed by research on similar popula-

tions, revealed that Kay's students were likely more interested in rule-based grammar instruction than their native-speaking peers.

While the nonnative speakers and basic writing students are similar groups in that they are less familiar with standard academic English, their needs are not identical. Paul Kei Matsuda argues that historically, universities have more often than not categorized second-language writers as basic writers regardless of their writing ability (67); for example, no second-language writers were placed directly into the for-credit section—1120—at MU in the academic year of this study. Echoing this call for more attention to language diversity, Susan Miller-Cochran writes that writing program administrators should remember that, even in cases where international or second-language students are separated into distinct classes, language differences are present and should be addressed in all writing classrooms (215).



Figure 2. Student Workstations, Kay's Course

Faculty Participants

Differences in the two teachers' backgrounds and orientations toward language teaching should be noted. Kay remarks in her faculty biography that she is a developmental writing specialist and that she regularly teaches FYW1100W, the basic writing course at MU intended for nonnative speakers, and has taught writing since 1990. During the classroom sessions that I

observed, Kay self-identified as a nonnative speaker of English who has lived in several countries and is of Asian heritage. Through my observations of her course, I learned that Kay values independent work and also individualized attention for each student. Most class lessons allowed five to fifteen minutes for students to work on their writing and Kay dedicated one full class period for each essay to independent in-class writing. The other faculty participant, May, was a graduate student in the English program at MU. May identifies as a white, native-speaker, and a “non-traditional” returning student. Prior to attending MU, May was a lawyer in a nearby city for many years. This was her first time teaching the basic writing section of this course and the third FYW course she has taught at MU.

Both courses used the mandatory universal program rubric in their assessments, a feature that greatly impacted how students understood and valued writing.

Findings

The data collected throughout the semester revealed that a student’s understanding of his or her writing errors may be very different from his or her instructor’s but that classroom artifacts, such as MU’s standard program rubric, may strongly shape the way that students think about writing. Rubrics can be opportunities for establishing values, but too often overly focus on sentence-level writing above large, complex issues. The effects of this heightened focus played out in my study’s findings as I describe below.

The rubric used at MU had five detailed categories with a majority focusing on grammar and structure: audience, organization, development, word choice, syntax, and usage/mechanics. Each section of the rubric was scored as “pass” or “no pass”, and students must pass all sections of the rubric in order to pass an essay. Each section was weighted equally. Thus, the entirety of assessment was focused on product rather than process or labor.

According to student survey results, the language of the rubric likely led to a troubling shift in student perception of “good” writing. At the beginning of the course, students felt critical thinking skills were more important to good writing than mechanics. Results showed that the language of the rubric heavily influenced the way that students talked about writing. This was true regardless of how they did or did not align to pedagogy implemented by the instructor. Early in the semester, many students listed “ideas” or “creativity” as most important to good writing; by the end of the semester, no students listed these as qualities of good writing and instead mimicked

rubric language, with the majority responding that some type of grammatical feature was an indicator of good writing—this is most likely due to the course rubric's heavy emphasis on grammar and syntax. Students learned to view good writing in terms of what was assessed and only what was assessed. One student responded that grammar makes one sound “educated,” stating, “It does in the way of making your paper sound as though your educated and know what you’re talking about.” Additionally, student survey responses indicated that they wanted to know academic English and valued “correctness” in the classroom.

Yet, both students and instructors preferred individual feedback to the rubric. Even though both May and Kay indicated that they did not heavily refer to rubric language (only marking the rubric with the required pass or fail) in their written feedback to students, students overwhelmingly used the rubric language in their end of the semester survey responses. One student participant noted that the rubric may have had potential as an assessment tool but that he did not look at it after the “pass” or “fail” grade was checked: “The rubric would have definitely helped me improve my writing. It told me exactly what I needed to do. But I never bothered to look at it.” Although students were highly influenced by the language of the rubric, they did not view it as transferable to their drafting or revision process.

Due to an overvaluing on mechanics and sentence-level issues, the rubric at MU muted differences in language variation likely to function as assets. Because this assessment tool influenced student perceptions of correctness in composition, it became a central point of my study. The course rubric listed sentence-level issues as 3/5 of potential errors, despite instructors feeling that organization and development were more significant issues. The rubric also listed “ESL difficulties” as a potential error under syntax, although Kay, the instructor of the section for nonnative speakers, felt that her students were more likely to exhibit specific issues in “Mechanics.” Neither students nor faculty knew specifically what “ESL difficulties” referred to. This factoring of grammar into assessment did not mirror course pedagogy, which emphasized a process-based approach to writing where students drafted, peer-reviewed, and revised essays. Here is an excerpt from the rubric, where the numbers in parenthesis link to a writing and grammar handbook:

IV. Syntax: The sentences of this essay are generally free of errors and appropriately varied.

___ ESL difficulties (57-58)

- __ Unintentional sentence
- __ Run-on sentences (33)
- __ Comma splices (33)
- __ Lack of variety in length/style (40)
- __ Misplaced/dangling modifiers (36)
- __ Inflated/wordy structures (42)
- __ Lack of active verbs (41e)
- __ Mixed constructions (35b)
- __ Problems w/ coordination/subordination (40b, 42c.1, A7)
- __ Faulty parallelism (43)

- __ Other:

Figure 3. MU rubric, excerpt, “Syntax.”

Reflections on the importance of grammar and syntax varied between the two classes observed; student survey data showed that international students desired much more help with grammar than American students, particularly with verb issues, although both groups of student participants replied that grammar was at least somewhat important to them. Both faculty instructors taught grammar in the context of writing rather than stand-alone exercises, although the instructor of the native speakers’ section taught grammar in terms of style and rhetorical effect, while the nonnative speaking students learned more about comparing language structures, due to many students having home languages that did not align to American English verb usage.

Responding to the question of what patterns of errors she saw in student writing, Kay stated:

There are so many circumstances that ask for a different verb usage and the students are still trying to figure out which type of verbs are appropriate for different situations. It’s not just as simple as “is this a past tense or is this a present tense?” ... I think verb usage is their biggest problem. Mostly, I would say with the Asian students. The two Middle Eastern

students are doing quite well. One is doing extremely well.

Kay also noted what she saw as cultural linguistic patterns in her students:

I shared with you information about [student's] use of transition about how he is very modest and sharing his own opinion. The phrase he constantly used was "in my honest opinion," "in my humble opinion," you know. I think it's because this is a cultural thing. They are just not used to giving rebuttal and speaking up on their own opinions. So that's kind of interesting.

A student participant agreed with Kay's assessment of student error patterns and felt that proficiency with standard syntax was necessary to be a competent writer: "grammar is probably the biggest problem for international students." Although structural issues were an important part of Kay's pedagogy, and thus assessment of student writing, these issues were not the largest factor in Kay's determining whether or not a student passed an essay, as the rubric might indicate. Although language differences were not mentioned on the rubric, Kay reviewed with students how specific languages differed from English in order to help students write with greater clarity; Paul Kei Matsuda writes that hiding these linguistic differences, rather than making them an explicit part of the classroom pedagogy as Kay had, ignores the needs of language diverse students and contributes to "linguistic containment" (87).

By the end of May's course, her native-speaking student population had developed a greater awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as writers, according to survey results. The traits that students listed as writing strengths—such as development and organization—more closely aligned with May's own observations about student writing strengths and weaknesses. Similarly to Kay's experiences, May noted that the rubric had the potential to be overwhelming to students and that the degree of specificity did not align with the errors she noted in her students' writing. This reveals that students develop a sense of writer agency throughout the semester; students were more aware of their writing progress and confident in what they needed to do during the revision process. In this sense, both students and instructor found teacher feedback to be the most helpful part of assessment, although students still used the language of the course rubric to talk about writing, as indicated by the absence of terms such as "ideas" and "creativity" in the final student survey where students were asked about qualities necessary for a piece of writing to be successful. Rubrics are clearly influential to

student's values on writing and assessment, and heuristics for rubrics that consider issues of language diversity might consider the multiple audiences and purposes for writing. Again, while students mimicked the language of the rubric, their responses indicated that they did not find it as helpful as instructor feedback or conferences when drafting or revising. Assessment is thus personal, and the relationship that developed between student and instructor was more valuable to students collectively than the tool. About ten percent of students in both courses wanted more individual conferences with instructors to discuss their work or grades.

My findings support previous studies that prove the inconsistencies of trying to match rate of error to improvement in writing. In 2008, Andrea Lunsford and Karen Lunsford revisited Lunsford and Connor's 1988 study of student error patterns. The pair found that students were writing more challenging, longer texts with the same rate of error, but that the types of error were changing—students were using more incorrect words and homophones (791 – 806) rather than sentence-level syntax errors. May's findings echo this study; she noted that the error pattern occurring most frequently in her students' writing was the "eggcorn" ("acorn") error—homophones. This trait fell underneath the rubric category of "Word Choice." Although May did not feel this issue was significant enough to keep a student from passing an essay, the rubric prompted her to acknowledge it.

When asked about patterns of errors, May replied:

Yes, I have noticed a whole series of words that they hear one way and are not writing correctly. In fact, I just had this with my son the other day. He came in and he said "what are you saying when you say 'innohvitsel'?" And I said you're saying—he said "No, no, I know what it means, but what are you literally writing?" Like, he didn't know it was in-and-of-itself. He didn't know it was four separate words because he's never seen it written; he's only heard it.

Native speakers such as May's students are more likely to use conversational English, and May did not feel that the rubric aligned with the errors she found in student writing:

I tend not to mark a lot of stuff in those sections via the rubric. . . There's so much of it that it gives the impression that that's the key stuff when really, I'm more concerned about development and thesis statements, stuff like that. So I don't know. I don't know if they are overwhelmed by the rubric, or if they even get the rubric.

The students agreed with their instructors about the rubric, feeling that it had potential but was unhelpful in its current iteration. In this sense, the rubric was more of a routine artifact than a useful tool for students.

A Rubric to Foster Language Diversity: The University of Southern Florida Model

Rubrics that treat academic English as one variety of English—one of many—demonstrate the rhetorical nature of language, audience, and text. Conversely, rubrics that highly focus on a single notion of correctness may discourage students from thinking of writing in terms of the rhetorical situation and language diversity. Assessments leave a lasting impact on student attitudes toward writing during the course but also on how students think about writing in their future experiences. Likely in this case, because both students and instructors had little to say about how or why the rubric was valuable to them, the rubric as an assessment tool was not used to its full potential. This particular rubric was dense with many repetitive categories and instructor participants had conflicting ideas about what categories most corresponded to the errors present in student writing. A more rhetorical and labor-valuing approach to assessment, as called for by Greenfield and Inoue, where rubrics and grading criteria are reflexive depending on the assignment, could make the assessment process more useful to students.

In her 2012 essay, “How Writing Rubrics Fail,” Valerie Balester discusses how rubrics can influence students with diverse language backgrounds as she examines the portrayal of standard academic English in writing rubrics. Balester found that rubrics tend to fall into three categories: acculturationism, those which count errors to determine correctness, such as electronic tests; accomodationism, or more “middle-ground” rubrics that are similar to acculturationism rubrics but make some limited attempt to accommodate second-language writers, and multiculturalism, which are rubrics that incorporate principles of the CCCC position statement on language diversity through the emphasis of “writerly agency” (72). These rubrics do this not only through showing the contextual nature of language and audience appropriateness, but through use of terminology that eschews correct or not correct attitudes toward assessment.

One rubric that Balester reviews describes mechanical errors as “beginning, developing, competent, or advanced” (72), which stresses the process-based nature of writing rather than the product alone. Balester also adds that these rubrics discuss grammar as effective or ineffective rather than correct

or incorrect. The author explains, “rubrics announce forcefully how we define ‘good’ writing” (Balester 64). Thus, it’s important to have assessment artifacts that value language diversity rather than a focus on only one “correct” dialect. When focus is on the latter, as my survey data showed, rubrics are more influential to how students think about assessment than even teacher feedback—MU students used this language to define what “good” writing was. Rubrics that portray writing as either correct or incorrect have the potential to focus on what not to do rather than what to do.

According to Balester’s criteria, MU’s rubric would fall under an accommodationism approach since it does acknowledge “ESL difficulties,” but lists this item only as a potential error in student writing without defining what the phrase means. As mentioned previously, there are six rubric categories with three focusing on sentence-level issue. The phrase “ESL difficulties” is listed as a syntax error, along with other errors such as comma splices, lack of variety, coordination/subordination issues. By contrast, there is no one error or series of errors attributed solely to nonnative speakers of English, as evidenced by the instructor interviews and student surveys.

Based on Balester’s description of a multicultural rubric as an assessment that establishes agency and acknowledges the various levels of writing proficiency, writing programs should consider adapting rubrics to more fully value the process-based nature of writing instruction and change from “pass,” “almost pass,” and “no pass” to categories such as “beginning,” “intermediate,” and “advanced”—with no one single category passing or failing an essay.

Scholarship supporting the use of writing rubrics is mixed, with supporters arguing that rubrics provide needed assessment norming and critics believing that rubrics oversimplify the complex act of writing assessment. Going beyond assessment of writing for individual students, a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Writing Assessment* by Joe Moxley supports the use of rubrics as a means of assessment norming. At the University of South Florida (USF), Moxley used a self-designed software program called *My Reviewers* to collect and categorize information on 100,000 student essays over a three-year period, scored with USF’s community rubric, a term reflective of its “crowdsourced” design, created with instructor, student, and staff feedback (3). Moxley found that the rubrics did provide assessment norming and were reliable tools for scoring student writing. Notably, unlike MU’s, USF’s rubric would likely fall under Balester’s category of multiculturalism as it did not directly tie a passing or failing grade to any one rubric category; they were used holistically in scoring.

In doing so, the USF rubric comports with more socially just renderings of individual assessment. The USF rubric's categories of "Focus," "Evidence," "Organization," "Style," and "Format" emphasize writing and thinking processes. There are two hierarchies within most of these categories: "basics" and "critical thinking," with the former focusing on satisfactory completion of required essay elements and the latter assessing higher order logic. For example, the "Focus" category lists meeting the assignment requirements as a basic-level skill, and crafting an "insightful/intriguing" thesis as a critical thinking component. The majority of this rubric assesses the ideas and development in a student's work. Instead of awarding full or no credit to any one section, the instructor scores a piece of writing at "Emerging," "Developing," or "Mastering" level (4) on a scale of 0-4.

Additionally, syntax is assessed as a stylistic choice rather than a grammatical one, appearing under the category of "Style." Although this rubric does list "correct grammar" as a feature of a "Mastering" level student essay, it also notes "rhetorically sound" syntax in this same category. Style is the only category in the rubric that examines sentence-level mechanics and showcases to students the purposefulness of linguistic variation. The effect is to lessen the idea of one correct, standard notion of writing that is presented in what Balester refers to as accommodationism rubrics.

Moxley's study shows that assessment tools that foster a sense of language diversity and rhetorically-situated notions of "correctness" still provide solid norming and can be useful feedback to students. He notes that the success of this rubric in comparison to others is that the community rubric reflects the "real-world" writing situations in which students might find themselves. Students with diverse language backgrounds may receive less feedback on rhetorical features of writing and are generally less likely to pass a writing course (Ball; Kelly-Riley), and rubrics such as those at the USF, have the potential to provide a sense of multiculturalism while still championing "good" writing. Unlike MU's rubric, which presents error as the presence or absence of an element of writing, USF's rubric indicates the growing progression of a draft.

Themes for Rethinking Classroom-Based Assessments

The results of the study at Midwestern University revealed key information about how students with diverse language backgrounds experience the assessment process and therefore provide guidelines for best practices in assessment. Findings suggest that assessment artifacts should be aligned





Criteria	Level	Emerging 0	1	Developing 2	3	Mastering 4
Focus 	Basics	Does not meet assignment requirements		Partially meets assignment requirements		Meets assignment requirements
	Critical Thinking	Absent or weak thesis; ideas are underdeveloped, vague or unrelated to thesis; poor analysis of ideas relevant to thesis		Predictable or unoriginal thesis; ideas are partially developed and related to thesis; inconsistent analysis of subject relevant to thesis		Insightful/intriguing thesis; ideas are convincing and compelling; cogent analysis of subject relevant to thesis
Evidence 	Critical Thinking	Sources and supporting details lack credibility; poor synthesis of primary and secondary sources/evidence relevant to thesis; poor synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis; rarely distinguishes between writer's ideas and source's ideas		Fair selection of credible sources and supporting details; unclear relationship between thesis and primary and secondary sources/evidence; ineffective synthesis of sources/evidence relevant to thesis; occasionally effective synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis; inconsistently distinguishes between writer's ideas and source's ideas		Credible and useful sources and supporting details; cogent synthesis of primary and secondary sources/evidence relevant to thesis; clever synthesis of visuals/personal experience/anecdotes relevant to thesis; distinguishes between writer's ideas and source's ideas
	Organization	Basics Confusing opening; absent, inconsistent, or non-relevant topic sentences; few transitions and absent or unsatisfying conclusion		Uninteresting or somewhat trite introduction, inconsistent use of topic sentences, segues, transitions, and mediocre conclusion		Engaging introduction, relevant topic sentences, good segues, appropriate transitions, and compelling conclusion
Style 	Basics	Frequent grammar, punctuation errors; inconsistent point of view		Some grammar/punctuation errors occur in some places; somewhat consistent point of view		Correct grammar and punctuation; consistent point of view
	Critical Thinking	Significant problems with syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary		Occasional problems with syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary		Rhetorically-sound syntax, diction, word choice, and vocabulary; effective use of figurative language
Format 	Basics	Little compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; minimal attention to document design		Inconsistent compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; some attention to document design		Consistent compliance with accepted documentation style (i.e., MLA, APA) for paper formatting, in-text citations, annotated bibliographies, and works cited; strong attention to document design

Figure 4. University of Southern Florida's Community Rubric (Moxley 4).

with course pedagogy and explained during instructional time, and that tools should indicate the process-based nature of writing rather than an overt focus on "correctness." Based on these indications and current scholarship in basic writing and language diversity, these proposed activities may help foster language diversity in the assessment process.

I present the following themes for rethinking classroom-based assessments:

Using Feedback to Complement Tools

Rubric language had a great impact on how students understood their writing as indicated by the language students used in their survey responses when discussing their strengths and weaknesses. This was most evident in May's class, as these students—unfamiliar with college-level writing or MU's assessment language until this course—drastically shifted the way they talked about writing by the end of the semester in order to mirror the language of the program rubric and to focus on the goals of development, organization, and grammar. Kay's students talked about writing in a way that echoed the categories of the rubric from the beginning, but these students had participated in other writing courses in the ESOL program at MU using the same rubric and similar learning outcomes. This indicates students may carry the language of the writing rubric into future writing courses. This also suggests that assessments implemented by WPAs affect student understanding of writing assessment as much as or even more so than other practices implemented at only the classroom-level.

While assessing the mechanics of writing can be valuable—and is often explicitly desired by students—writing instructors and programs should take care to also consider other less “assessable” features of writing, such as creativity and reflection. The National Writing Project's “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing,” identifies habits of mind necessary for success in college-level writing and those include “creativity,” “openness,” and “flexibility.” Students in this study ceased to value these features by the end of the semester because they were not listed on any classroom artifact, including the program's rubric. Assessment tools designed to acknowledge the rhetorical nature of writing, such as collaborative rubrics or grading contracts, can acknowledge and value these features better than tools that focus solely on an end product as the measure of success.

Designing assessments collaboratively with students reinforces the rhetorical nature of both writing and assessment: both are in flux based on audience and purpose. For example, at MU, instructors may have simplified the detailed sub-categories of the rubric to more clearly reflect students' writing concerns or perhaps in Kay's case, remove the “ESL difficulties” language to refer to the more specific usage errors she encountered in student writing. Given that students did not understand these rubric categories, student input and feedback on its design would have enlightened faculty and administration to this. Although it is based on a small sample, a 2005 study by Judy Fowler and Robert Ochsner suggests that universities with higher admissions

rate may overly focus on sentence-level correctness due to outside pressure rather than engagement with texts and ideas.

For this reason, classroom activities such as self-assessment and co-designing rubrics can bridge the acts of invention and revision by giving a sense of purpose to writing. Ideally, rubrics should align with learning outcomes and goals that are established for each assignment. To model Inoue's pedagogy model, for example, the labor of the drafting and revision should factor into assessment. Assessment strategies should consider more than just the finished product—having the potential to overemphasize standard correctness, as in the case of MU's rubric—and instead, or in tandem, assess the amount of drafting and revision.

Aligning rubric language to specific assignments and integrating it more fully into course pedagogy matters. One classroom idea for instructors may be to have students give mini-presentations on sections of the rubric, or have students use the rubric during peer review. Students can then offer suggestions as to what was useful on the rubric (or other assessment tool) having used it to assess a peer's work. At MU, student survey results indicated that they did not find the tool useful for drafting or revision assistance, but the data also revealed that students adopted the language to talk about writing strengths and weaknesses. This leads us to consider how important it is to discuss the rhetorical nature of the concept of "good writing" throughout these collaborations on assessment.

For instructors working in an environment with a standard rubric, other tools may help clarify or supplement the rubric language. For example, both May and Kay did supplement with informal assessments. May had students read their essays aloud in the drafting stages in order to "self-correct" their work and to develop writer agency. Kay also had students assess their own writing by having students write about what they changed from one essay draft to the next. These reflective approaches to assessment assist students in developing the writerly agency that the CCC's position statement, SRTOL, recommends in order to foster an environment of language diversity. This agency not only helps students become better at understanding what to revise, but it also enables students to decipher the complex rhetorical nature of writing, genre, and varieties of English.

Assessment as Values: Code-Meshing and Grading Contracts

In order to make rubrics—such as those at MU—more in line with both Moxley and Balester's definition of a multicultural assessment tool, programs need to reduce the focus on sentence-level error and respond to levels of student progress, from beginning to advanced competency in any given

area of writing. Rubrics might acknowledge the diverse writing situations in which students find themselves by changing assessment criteria based upon an assignment. As part of this, instructors should consider modeling the code-switching or code-meshing that occurs in writing.

In *Code-meshing as World English*, Vershawn Ashanti Young writes that code-meshing, rather than code-switching “allows minoritized people to become more effective communicators by doing what we all do best, what comes naturally: blending, merging, meshing dialects” (100). For example, courses may include additional discussion on audience and context to discuss how students vary their language varieties from one situation to the next. Students might read diverse language models, noting the purpose and dialectal patterns, and align them to sections of a course rubric. As A. Suresh Canagarajah writes in “A Rhetoric of Shuttling Between Languages,” linguistic difference is not inherently a limitation to language proficiency; students are also managing rhetorical situation and writing genres (159). Models could be a way to see how rhetorical situations affect varieties of English. Staci Perryman-Clark proposes in “Toward a Pedagogy of Linguistic Diversity,” that students discuss social issues in relation to writing, such as having students discuss and respond to CCC’s *Students Rights to Their Own Language*.

Finally, a shift toward grading contracts and other methods that focus on process rather than product may be useful to lessen racialized assessment practices. As Asao Inoue’s previously discussed research in *Antiracist Writing Assessment Strategies* posits, the labor of writing should be valued over any single product of writing. Through assessment tools that invoke rhetorical situation, modeling varieties of English, and a process rather than product-based approach to assessment, writing instructors can help foster language diversity in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study provides insight on how students with a variety of language backgrounds understood writing assessment within a particular context, especially in regards to notions of correctness and what academic writing should “look like” at the classroom level. This study suggests that overemphasis of structural, sentence-level error in assessment tools rather than valuing the rhetorical nature of writing can unfairly penalize varieties of English most divergent from the mythical standard academic English.

While MU did have a universal rubric and portfolio exit assessment governing classroom-based practices, I studied the attitudes, impacts, and expectations of individual basic writing classrooms that I had anticipated would enroll students with a wide variety of language backgrounds. Further studies might examine the effects of programmatic assessments through a student's entire postsecondary career or through an interdisciplinary lens. Finally, it may also be useful to study other institutions with a diverse range of assessments such as grading contracts or individualized rubrics to learn more about other writing assessment tools and their impact on fostering varieties of English. There is still much to be discovered about student and instructor practices in a variety of settings.

The students enrolled in MU's basic writing courses came to their first-year writing classes with a wide variety of writing experiences and language backgrounds. Their instructors also were equipped with diverse teaching experiences and preparation. And yet, the program represents a typical Midwestern university setting with its large student body, rural setting, and the majority of students residing on campus. Data for this study reveals that, despite what may seem like an institution with little need for attention to language diversity, its students are not only linguistically diverse—with both American students and international students listing a language other than English as their native tongue—but have much to say about diverse languages in the writing classroom. Students worked to shape their own views of good writing and correct writing along with the assessment language used by the writing program, most notably in its universal rubric. This shift in thinking, from writing as a creative act of invention to writing as an act that can be measured in terms of organization and mechanics, shows that the assessment values we uphold in our writing classrooms have a great impact on students' views of writing and writing activities, and if we wish to move from possible notions of "correct" vs. "incorrect" writing to writing that is more or less effective depending on a given context, our assessments will play a large role in this shift.

Data collected revealed that both students and instructor tend to think of error as referring to sentence-level issues; this sentence-level error is often the cause of a student's placement into a basic writing course (Bizzell). However, students feel a variety of issues keep them from succeeding in writing, with most of them noting issues of development and organization, a finding that repeats a conclusion made in Linda Adler-Kassner's survey of basic writers at the University of Michigan-Dearborn ("Just Writing, Basically"). Therefore, assessment efforts should work to show where students have

progressed in their writing, noting where improvement as needed as well as a writer's strengths. In order to attend to the diverse varieties of English with which our students communicate, assessments might move away from notions of "correct" vs. "incorrect" through the use of language that indicates progress as a linear path rather complete or incomplete, as noted by Valerie Balester in her discussion of course rubrics. Individualized assessments that require students to reflect on the rhetorical nature of the writing process can encourage students to develop agency and focus on their progress.

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