

# Complicating “Containment” and Rewarding Revision: A Case Study of Multilingual Students in a WAC-Based First Term Seminar

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## Introduction

At the small liberal arts college in Minnesota where I teach, Lencho, a first-year student, reflected upon his earliest weeks on campus. Originally from Ethiopia, Lencho thrived at a culturally diverse Minneapolis high school. Here on campus, he felt isolated, frustrated, and silenced. But not in his First Term Seminar (FTS), “Why Multi Matters,” where he participated regularly in class discussion and peer response sessions. “I feel so relieved when I’m in our FTS class,” he admitted. His classmates in “Why Multi Matters,” a pilot FTS I taught for multilingual students only, echoed these sentiments. These students reported they often feel socially and academically isolated from their overwhelmingly white, monolingual peers elsewhere on campus. In “Why Multi Matters,” a writing across the curriculum (WAC) and general education gateway course, they shared experiences and together strategized ways to negotiate life at the college. In this essay, I discuss findings from a multimodal study of the pilot suggesting connections between students’ peer response experiences, revision success, and increased confidence in their writing. The study triangulates data from pre-, midterm, and post-course surveys; conferences with students and peer group observations; and a rubric-based assessment of their work.<sup>1</sup> I argue that the social and rhetorical dynamics in the classroom enhanced the students’ revisions of academic essays, resulting in another kind of revision: the students began to reimagine themselves as strong, successful writers and rhetorical resources for their peers.

Nine students selected this pilot, but all first-year students at Gustavus Adolphus College are required to complete a FTS course, the first writing intensive or “WRIT” course to satisfy our WAC writing requirement.<sup>2</sup> I was their FTS professor and academic adviser. All FTS sections also have an oral communication component and encourage students to discuss values within a specific disciplinary or cultural context.<sup>3</sup> “Why Multi Matters” began with the premise that multilingual students are uniquely prepared to learn how to enter the disciplinary conversations they will encounter in college. The course first invited students to reflect on the challenges they

have already faced as they pursued an education, using writers like Mark Edmundson and Sherman Alexie to start the conversation. Next, students investigated how diverse language users negotiate such challenges, putting their experiences into conversation with those of multilingual writers such as Richard Rodriguez and Maxine Hong Kingston. Students then considered how multilingual experiences might shape their academic work, especially as they entered new disciplines.

Such a course might be critiqued within recent composition studies literature. In “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity in U.S. College Composition” Paul Kei Matsuda has suggested that many college composition programs have practiced “containment” strategies—separating ELL students into their own sections of composition classes—rather than developing more progressive pedagogies to challenge the status quo (Matsuda, 2006). Such courses risk ghettoizing students as we recycle stale beliefs about language and subjectivity. Likewise, in “Language Diversity and the Responsibility of the WPA” (2010), Susan K. Miller-Cochran described “five myths about second language writing that negatively impact students in our writing classes by ignoring their linguistic diversity” (p. 213). Number four on her list: “Second language writing students can just be placed in a separate class, and then you don’t have to worry about them anymore” (Miller-Cochran, p. 215).

I complicate the containment argument by resituating it, considering the usefulness of a WAC-based seminar for multilingual students, including international students and recent immigrants, at Gustavus Adolphus College, a small, private liberal arts college with a social justice mission located in the rural Midwest. In this institutional context, where multilingual students make up approximately 10% of the student body, such a course enabled candid conversation and critical reflection about language, identity, and subjectivity. Here students of color, who constitute just 13% of the student population, struggle to see themselves reflected in the overwhelmingly white faculty, staff, and students on campus. Multilingual students at Gustavus often face social, cultural, and economic challenges as well as academic ones, which may lead them to question their decision to come to campus. Retention is a challenge, and multilingual students seek networks of support to help them balance the emotional and intellectual demands of schooling. A course designed specifically for a heterogeneous group of only multilingual first-year students can create such a network of support. At the same time, such a WAC-based course encourages rhetorical flexibility as students negotiate multiple rhetorical approaches with one another and prepare to enter new disciplines.

Even Matsuda has acknowledged social benefits when multilingual students work together in the classroom, noting that “To deny these support programs would be to further marginalize nonnative speakers of English,” especially when they matriculate at institutions where “the myth of linguistic homogeneity” continues to undergird

curricular decisions and structures (Matsuda 2006, p. 649). A course such as “Why Multi Matters” can be a stepping stone toward more progressive curricular structures, while supporting multilingual students and an institution’s efforts to recruit and retain them. At the same time, the course provides a useful introduction to Writing Across the Curriculum. Students discuss how they already shift rhetorical practices across cultural contexts, and then apply that knowledge as they study ways to learn new rhetorical strategies for new disciplinary contexts.

Ultimately, I argue that “Why Multi Matters” did not contain or stigmatize students but instead created alliances between peers within the course while informing campus-wide discussions about our increasingly diverse student body and writing work being done across the curriculum. Findings from the 2012 pilot suggest that as students built relationships with their peers, they developed successful revision practices. At the same time, the students revised their own ways of seeing themselves as writers, coming to view one another as trusted rhetorical resources. This is a key shift, especially crucial for students who may be accustomed to institutional attitudes suggesting they are underprepared, in need of “extra resources,” or a “challenge” to the college.

### **Why Framing Matters: Translingual Possibilities for a WAC-based Seminar**

The pilot embodied characteristics of a translingual approach as described by Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur in “Language Difference in Writing: Toward a Translingual Approach” (2011). But to view the course in this way, we must problematize arguments about “containment” made by Matsuda and others. Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur critiqued what they call “traditional approaches to writing in the United States,” which “assume heterogeneity in language impedes communication and meaning” (p. 303). Like Matsuda, Horner and collaborators criticized the institutional habit of placing linguistically diverse students in “special” sections of composition designed specifically for ESL writers or herding them into Basic Writing sections with struggling L1 writers. Matsuda’s “The Myth of Linguistic Homogeneity” explained how this assumption came to permeate Composition Studies, arguing that the field has imagined monolingual composition students as the norm and mastery of academic literacy and Standard Edited English as key goals (Matsuda, 2006).

Both Matsuda and Horner et al., however, represent the contained “ESL composition classroom” in one of two ways: as either a monolithic space where mostly international students study in large, public institutions to pursue professional degrees in fields such as engineering, medicine, business, or as a place where mostly disenfranchised immigrant students gather together to learn the basic academic writing skills necessary for success in first-year and equally monolithic composition courses. But

Gustavus doesn't offer composition courses of any kind and has been entirely WAC-based since the early 1980s. The FTS "Why Multi Matters" was an interdisciplinary writing-intensive seminar offered to a diverse group of multilingual first-year students, including international students, recent immigrants to the US and U.S.-born multilingual students.

Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur have argued that traditional approaches "have pushed students toward assimilation, seeking to obliterate forms of difference; or toward accommodation, allowing for diverse language practices for different situations, but creating hierarchies where certain situations require 'standard' forms of English and others do not" (2011, p. 306). I agree—especially when separating multilingual students serves faculty members more than students ("Give them to the ESL specialist!") or keeps international students away from domestic students. Likewise, I do not endorse using non-credit bearing sections to remediate multilingual students, a practice critiqued by those who challenged the history of Basic Writing courses and the tendency to assign students of color to such classes (Bartholomae, 1993; Scott, 1993; Smoke and Otte, 1997). But this pilot WRITI course did not attempt to teach students to "standardize" their work in any way. Rather, the learning outcomes for the WAC-based course include goals such as these: "Students choose effective rhetorical strategies shaped by their appreciation for purpose, audience, and context for the writing task." A complete list of SPC's Student Learning Outcomes for writing in a first-year course can be found in Appendix A.

Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur have suggested a translingual alternative, envisioned as a "research-based and generative conceptual approach to language difference in pedagogy, research, and politics" (p. 304). Building upon the CCCC 1974 resolution "Students' Right to their Own Language," which addressed questions of difference related to dialect, Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur extended the argument to "differences within and across all languages" (p. 304), advocating that we view and define "languages and language varieties as fluid," paying careful attention to the cultural and historical movements that propel such change. They also encouraged us to see "language differences and fluidities as resources to be preserved, developed, and utilized" (p. 304). Perhaps most importantly, a translingual approach must question "myths of unchanging, universal standards for language" and instead consider "the variety, fluidity, intermingling, and changeability of languages as statistically demonstrable norms around the globe" (p. 305). Doing so places rhetorical negotiation front and center pedagogically, as students learn how and why languages change over time, and then recognize and practice strategies that enable them to succeed as communicators across cultural contexts and generic boundaries.

Here, translingual approaches share goals with WAC: focusing on fluidity and multidisciplinary, helping students adapt to different discourse situations, writing to

communicate, and adapting to new readers and their needs. Such rhetorical negotiation was the focus for “Why Multi Matters,” as this general education course assumed that multilingual students are already successful users of language and diverse rhetorical strategies. As a WAC course, this FTS section engaged students in the study of how their intended disciplines—defined as diverse in terms of their exigencies and generic traditions—might call for certain rhetorical strategies or diverse language skills. As students shared their knowledge with one another, they also described and critiqued the ways that their own cultural and linguistic practices shaped their language use, especially on campus. Thus, the course both introduced WAC-related concepts—disciplinarity, discourse community, and genre—and complicated those concepts by considering how language and culture shape our ways of taking part in the fields we enter.

Collaborative pedagogical strategies such as peer response highlighted and enabled such possibilities. In “Why Multi Matters,” because of the course’s institutional context, the push and pull between homogeneity and heterogeneity positively affected students’ work. The students all belonged to an underrepresented group on campus—they were both multilingual and students of color at an institution where 92% of the students are white and monolingual—and this shared-subject position enhanced their peer response experiences. This, in turn, led to more extensive revisions of their work. At the same time, this widely diverse group of multilingual students spoke more than a dozen languages and negotiated constantly, developing more and more accessible language for responding to one another’s writing. This, too, enhanced peer response and their writing. Finally, as part of our WAC program, the course was steeped in a rhetorical context that emphasized fluidity and multiplicity.

## Why Revision Matters: Review of the Literature

### *Revision and Multilingual Students*

Many scholars have shown (including Sommers, 1980; Faigley et. al, 1981; Harris, 2003; Myhill and Jones, 2007) that ways of conceptualizing and practicing revision distinguish experienced, skilled writers from novice, less skilled writers. Within TESOL and ESL scholarship, similar conversations exist. Scholars have cautioned us not to assume that L1 and L2 writers are the same or that they will respond to pedagogical interventions in identical ways (Raimes, 1985 and Silva, 1993). Still, most agree that a process-based approach to writing instruction, where instructors and peers intervene in drafting and revision via direct feedback, has helped ESL writers to engage with course material and succeed with academic writing (Zamel, 1976; Raimes, 1985; Myles 2002; Williams, 2004). Thus, helping multilingual students develop successful revision skills should help with retention and success.

Few, if any, studies of multilingual writers and revision have been situated within small, private colleges. There are studies of ESL student writers in graduate programs or professional contexts (Cox, 2010; Abasi, Akbari and Graves, 2006), some of which are undertaken in writing centers, but the challenges faced by graduate students, many of whom are represented as international rather than Generation 1.5, differ from those of undergraduates. Likewise, studies of undergraduate multilingual and ESL writers at community colleges and large urban universities abound in TESOL literature (D'Alessio and Riley, 2002; Fishman and McCarthy, 2002; Hirsch and DeLuca, 2003), but have often represented students as struggling or underprepared writers. The multilingual students in this study, on the other hand, excelled in high school and chose to attend Gustavus precisely because of its small classes and focus on leadership development and social justice.

### *Peer Response, Collaboration, and Multilingual Students*

At Gustavus, writing intensive courses focus on revision, and peer response is a staple, as it has been in process-based writing courses across the United States in the last three to four decades (Ferris, 2003) because peer response often effectively improves student writing. Peer response focuses attention on rhetorical issues, fosters collaboration, and encourages more substantive revision. Writers speculate about audience, as students help one another anticipate problem areas for future readers or celebrate particularly helpful or evocative textual moments. Peer response helps students understand audience as multi-faceted, a continuum ranging from those who are “addressed” to those who are “invoked” (Ede and Lunsford, 1984).

In addition, peer response fosters collaboration. As argued by Bruffee (1984), collaborative learning not only changes the way that we teach and learn, but also the substance of the learning itself, drawing attention to the ways that groups negotiate meaning and create conventions. Bruffee’s work at CUNY in the 1970s helped a new population of underprepared students—returning white, working-class Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans of color and new immigrants—adapt to the rhetorical demands of college. Collaborative pedagogies have also emphasized that conventions arise within communities that decide, as a group, why such conventions are important.

A teacher-driven feedback cycle enables instructors to model conventions, too, as well as intervene into students’ drafting and revision processes. But scholars have raised concerns about teachers appropriating students’ texts (Knoblauch and Brannon, 1982; Sommers, 1982) during the revision phase, especially those of ESL students (Reid, 1994). After analyzing differing viewpoints regarding the efficacy and efficiency of teachers’ written feedback for L1 and L2 students, Ferris noted that scholars speak in unison regarding peer review: “nearly all of the scholars . . . who express doubts or concerns about teacher feedback simultaneously voice enthusiasm

for the use of peer response groups in the writing class,” acknowledging that “this nearly unqualified endorsement of peer feedback has had tremendous influence in L2 pedagogy and research” (Ferris, 2003, p. 15). Peer response is a staple within most composition courses, including those intended for ELL or multilingual students.

But peer response is not a panacea for multilingual writers, especially in collaborative situations with white, monolingual writers. Zamel and Spack (2006) found that ESOL students reported “fear that their linguistic and cultural differences mask their intelligence and knowledge,” and were often reticent to speak out during discussion (p. 129). So, what happens to multilingual students who use peer response and other collaborative strategies in classrooms where they are grouped heterogeneously with white, monolingual students? In “A Narrow Thinking System: Nonnative-English-Speaking Students in Group Projects Across the Curriculum,” Ilona Leki (2001) stated that “a large and mainly optimistic body of research exists on the benefits of group work among peers” (p. 40). Leki then showed us that multilingual students do not always have positive collaborative experiences with monolingual students. Instead, they may be treated as subordinates or given menial tasks instead of academically challenging ones. In such situations, multilingual students may not develop revision skills in part because they do not receive engaged, critical feedback on their work. Without such feedback, revision is difficult at best, as students may not learn how to read their own work critically. In bringing a diverse group of multilingual students together, “Why Multi Matters” mitigated against the potential downfalls of peer review in a monolingual classroom.

### *Course Description and Methodology*

In “Why Multi Matters,” students participated in large and small group discussions; wrote ten short reader-response papers; and drafted, workshopped, and revised three formal essays, which were assessed via portfolio. They also investigated the disciplinary conventions of their prospective major field. The class met four days per week for fifty minutes. The formal essay assignments were sequenced to first help students reflect on how their linguistic and cultural backgrounds shaped the transition from home to college. The assignments became increasingly analytical, as students critiqued other writers’ positions on bilingual education and ultimately described and analyzed how their experiences as multilingual people had helped prepare them to make their next transition to a new academic discipline or major field of study.

Students read both fiction and nonfiction, including Sherman Alexie’s novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, Richard Rodriguez’s *The Hunger for Memory*, a memoir, and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior*, which is typically categorized as autobiography, as well as short articles about literacy, bilingualism, and liberal arts education.<sup>4</sup> Andrea Lunsford’s *Everyday Writer* was also

required. The readings highlighted connections and tensions between one's cultural and/ or linguistic identity and the process of becoming educated. In Alexie's accessible, loosely autobiographical novel, the protagonist chooses to leave his reservation school in order to attend a more affluent, white high school more than twenty miles away. Rodriguez explores education as a process of cultural assimilation and considers the implications of that process. Kingston uses narrative to bridge cultural divides and illustrates the ways that literacy enables movement across cultural contexts.

The other short readings featured multiple perspectives on higher education, bilingual education, and what it means to be multilingual in the US, complicating or extending discussion. After reading Rodriguez, for instance, students used sociolinguist Myers-Scotton's work on bilingualism to support their essays, which challenged Rodriguez's stance on bilingual education. A final research project then invited them to first identify recent "hot topics" within their chosen field of study, interview a working writer within that field, and then investigate how their educational experiences as multilinguals might help them transition into this new discourse community. Students left the class with a richer, more sophisticated understanding of how language and identity shape our educational experiences.

### *Research Subjects*

Four female and five male students completed the course. Most were Generation 1.5; two had immigrated more recently to the US, and one was an international student. Their families came from Vietnam, China, Laos, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Somalia, and Mexico, as well as other places. All spoke English and at least one additional language; a few were trilingual. Seven completed high school in the Twin Cities area in urban or suburban schools. One student completed high school in a rural Minnesota district; the other in Cancun, Mexico. Among the eight educated in the US, only one took actual ESL classes for at least one class period per day in high school. None reported receiving "pull-out" writing instruction for ESL students in high school, but three students reported some "additional writing instruction from teachers." In sum, these students had been mainstreamed at the high school level. Many had taken AP courses; all were highly successful, motivated students.

### *Data Collection*

While teaching the pilot, I triangulated direct observation, survey data, and rubric-based assessment in order to garner a full, dynamic view of my students' revision practices, in terms of both process and product. Since I wanted to study how this course affected their revision strategies, I needed to consider how students described and felt about current and prior revision experiences, and I needed to look at their drafts to describe and assess the kinds of revisions made. To minimize bias, I did not



consider my own assessment of the students' revisions but rather depended on my colleagues to assess the portfolios for this project. I tracked students' revision practices in several ways. I logged the 1,320 minutes that students spent in conference with me in fall of 2012, as well as the topics of each conversation. Next, I acted as a participant observer on peer-response days, taking notes on student interactions, collecting copies of peers' comments on one another's drafts, and reflecting weekly in a teaching journal.

Survey data documented students' perceptions of their previous and current revision experiences and attitudes toward writing, revision, and peer response. Students were surveyed three times during the semester: week one, at mid-term, and post-completion. There was a 100% response rate to all three anonymous surveys. The surveys used a five-point Likert scale to gauge students' agreement or disagreement with a variety of statements about experiences and attitudes. In addition, dinner conversations were held at mid-term and post-completion, where students discussed with me and their fellow students their ongoing FTS experiences.

Finally, four WAC program faculty readers volunteered to complete a rubric-based assessment of student work (see Appendix B). Each FTS portfolio included multiple drafts of each of three formal essays: two argumentative and one narrative piece.<sup>5</sup> Only the first and final submitted drafts of the two argumentative essays were assessed. Categories assessed included Thesis, Major Claims and Support for Claims, Coherence, Clarity and Readability, and Conventions. The four readers were the FTS director (political science); the writing center director (English); and two additional FTS and WAC instructors (Economics and Management and Religion, respectively). The faculty members convened in mid-January of 2013 for a norming session before assessing the essays. Each read eighteen essays, anonymous and randomized, including first and final drafts of both of the two argumentative essays.

### **Why Outcomes Matter: Peer Response, Self-Confidence, and Rubric-Based Revision Assessment**

The rubric drew from the AACU Written Communication VALUE Rubric, but categories were revised to privilege demonstrable rhetorical outcomes typically valued by faculty at Gustavus<sup>6</sup>. These criteria were developing a clear thesis; using framing strategies, such as an introduction and a conclusion; making and supporting major claims; creating coherence via transitions at the paragraph and sentence levels; exhibiting clarity and readability at the sentence level; and demonstrating the ability to use conventions, such as citing sources and including a Works Cited page.

As the figures here suggest, faculty readers found the second drafts of both essays to be one or two points higher than their first draft counterparts in every rubric category.

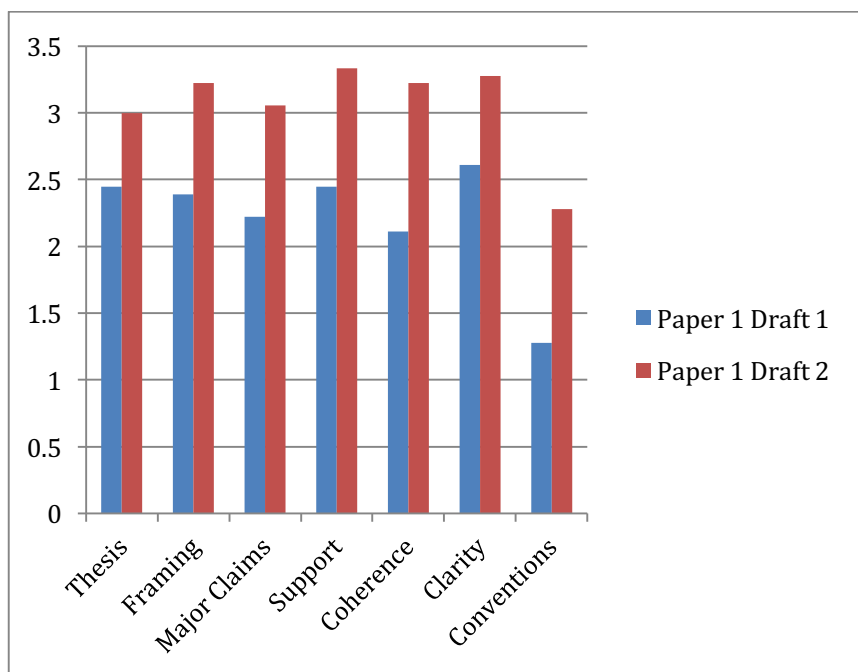


Figure 1. Faculty Scores Paper 1.

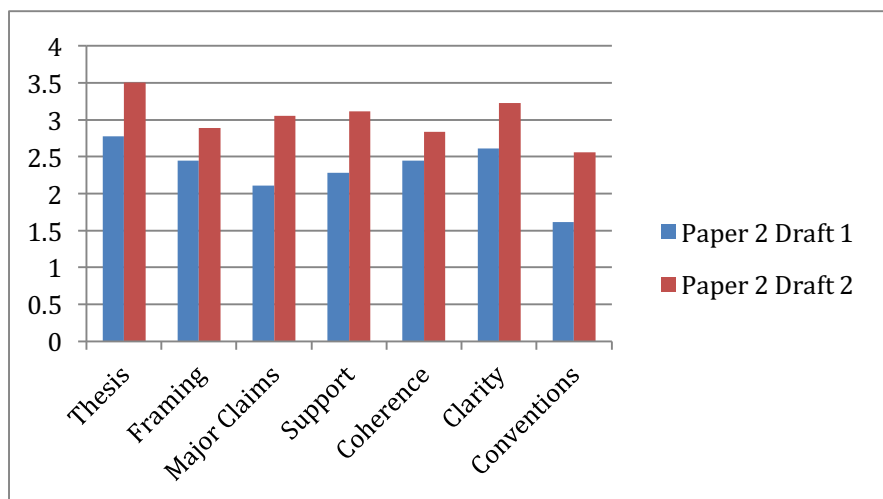


Figure 2. Faculty Scores Paper 2

### *Usefulness of Peer Response*

On Survey One, 66% reported using peer review in high school “for most assignments.” All reported being grouped heterogeneously with monolingual peers in that setting. Of the 66% that reported using peer review for most assignments, more than half disagreed strongly with a statement that characterized peer review as “usually helpful.” But their experiences were quite different during the pilot. On Surveys Two and Three, 100% reported either agreeing or agreeing strongly that they were “comfortable sharing work with peers in FTS.” At mid-term, 78% characterized the peer review sessions in FTS as “helpful,” and by Survey Three that number increased to 88%. Typically, 70–90% of students reported that peer response was helpful to them in terms of global issues: generating ideas and planning, structuring and organizing, providing evidence, and learning to introduce and conclude. Likewise, the same percentages of students agreed that their peers had helped to identify local or sentence level errors, with a slight trend upwards at Survey Three.

### *Shifts in Self-Perception*

On Survey One, 78% of students reported that they had typically received “good grades” on their writing assignments in high school. Most students stated that they considered themselves to be at least “average” writers in high school while 33% agreed with the statement that they considered themselves “strong” writers, and one agreed with the statement that “I considered myself to be a weak writer in high school.” As the semester progressed, all students were less likely to agree with the classification of themselves as “weak” or “average” writers. By the end of the FTS, 100% either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement: “I now consider myself to be a strong writer.”

### **Why “Why Multi Matters” Worked: Discussion**

Faculty readers’ scores suggested that students improved their revision practices, as final drafts of each argumentative essay scored higher than first drafts in every category of the rubric. Survey data showed that students reported both extremely positive experiences with peer response during FTS, as well as an increasing tendency to view themselves as “strong” writers over time. The two key outcomes—stronger revision skills and increased self-confidence—are crucial for success in college. I would argue that positive peer-response experience was a critical factor enabling those outcomes.

But useful peer response experiences aren’t just born—they’re made. I believe that my interactions with students, both individually and during class, helped create a classroom where students could maximize the benefits of peer response. First, this FTS promoted a classroom culture where individual communication with the professor was the norm. From the very first week of class, the students met individually with

the instructor, for both required and optional conferences. This conference-heavy pedagogy provided students with frequent feedback on their writing and opportunities to discuss their individual experiences. In affirming those experiences, I encouraged students to view themselves—their own stories—as valid sources of evidence. For instance, Lencho, who had immigrated a few years ago from Ethiopia, shared his frustrations about strained communication with his monolingual peers and other professors, who typically asked him to repeat himself whenever he spoke. I listened, and then asked him to reflect on how often his FTS classmates—none of whom were also Ethiopian—had trouble understanding him. Affirming that he was, in fact, a capable communicator enabled him to take the next step and identify other factors that might affect his communicative success—including a lack of effort from listeners—and their rhetorical and ethical implications.

A portfolio evaluation system also supported regular conferencing. Students worked steadily and recursively throughout the semester, and they benefited from tackling small, manageable goals during each conference. Finally, because all peer review sessions took place during class, I could observe and then reiterate whatever good advice they received from peers when we conferenced. In this way, conferences helped to reinforce a key message from the course: your peers can provide valuable, accurate responses to your work because they are knowledgeable rhetorical resources.

As students grew comfortable conversing with me, they spoke more freely in class and valued their peers' contributions. Every reading and writing assignment addressed culture, language use, and education, and I encouraged connections between course texts and personal experience. Classroom conversations were fruitful because each student had firsthand experience transitioning across cultural and linguistic boundaries and each willingly shared that experience. When students began to conduct peer response, they were accustomed to having their contributions validated by both peers and professor. Even their peer response sessions for the research-based projects, where students had to read and respond to texts from well outside their disciplinary interests, were productive and positive. The classroom culture seemed to help students consider what it means to enter and study a new discipline.

I suspect that because each student brought a different set of communication practices to the table, concepts like disciplinary discourse or multiple academic languages were easier to grasp. By enrolling a diverse group of students who spoke a language other than English at home, "Why Multi Matters" exposed every student to an array of cultural backgrounds and communication strategies daily, which I encouraged students to notice and analyze during class. Whether they were describing conventions of verbal turn-taking at home, or speculating about why Rodriguez gave up his heritage language at school, students made connections between language and culture. I then utilized those moments of connection to highlight concepts like *conventions* in

the course, or to urge students to think about how a particular field of study might operate like a family or community.

Whenever possible, I used brief, informal writing to learn (WTL) exercises to highlight rhetorical concepts and to compare how such concepts operated within each student's home community. I then extended the discussion to more academic contexts. Peer response made such concepts even more visible because it invited students to query one another about their choices as writers. In observing peer response groups, I noticed students moving far beyond identifying unclear sentences or punctuation snafus. As they workshopped their second argumentative essays, for example, I heard an international student urging a classmate raised in the US to "use logic" and provide more evidence to explain American resistance to bilingualism. In that same group, a Generation 1.5 student was lauded for using personal examples—appealing to both ethos and pathos—to critique the lack of support he received as an ELL student in middle school.

Following those peer response sessions, I shared excerpts from students' essays to highlight such distinctions among their drafts. I tried as often as possible to identify the most useful aspects of their peers' feedback. I wanted them to realize how accurate and helpful their peers' feedback could be, because I believed that if they recognized one another's helpfulness as rooted in rhetorical competence, they could see that competence in themselves, too.

### *Rubric-Based Assessment*

The four faculty readers, representing four disciplines, scored all the second drafts of both Essay One and Two higher than the first drafts. All agreed: the revision cycle worked in the pilot, as evidenced by higher scores for second drafts of each essay across the rubric's rhetorical categories. The four readers noted larger gains between draft one of Essay One and draft two of Essay One than with the revision process for Essay Two. This makes sense, as some students wrote three or four drafts of the first assignment (they could revise all semester long), but only two drafts of the later assignment, which they began to write much later in the semester.

The assessment showed statistically significant gains moving from draft one to draft two in every category of the rubric except for "conventions." This suggests that the students were able to understand global concerns related to introducing and concluding an essay, framing ideas, making and supporting claims, and introducing and speaking back to sources. They could in turn help their colleagues improve their work most in these areas. I argue that these gains are the most important ones, as they relate to students developing increasingly fluid, flexible strategies for framing and introducing their ideas, making and supporting claims, and helping readers think about implications—all critical moves that writers make across the curriculum. But the gap

between faculty scores and student scores in the “conventions” area suggests students were less able to help their peers identify and correct local issues related to MLA citation format, the style used in my home discipline of English and generally adopted by the FTS program, or the conventions for citing sources. Interestingly, these conventions are often represented as static—simply presented via a single chapter in a handbook, or as an addendum to textbook. Rarely do first-year college students encounter explanations of where citation formats come from or why they matter. They thought that citation conventions involved learning where to put the parentheses. These, my students understood, were the “rules” of writing in the classroom, and they made the least gains in learning to utilize them. I assume responsibility here for not tying in discussions of such issues to the course’s emphasis on dynamic, changing language practices.

One unexpected outcome of the assessment process was the benefit to the faculty readers themselves. They all remarked upon how “interesting” and “engaging” the essays were, and several marveled at how students were able to weave their own experience in with arguments by and about the writers they read. Again, I attribute this to the deliberate design of the course, which put students in conversation with multilingual writers who had experienced similar transitions from home to school to professional life. These essays reminded the faculty members that students can, in fact, think, speak, and write regularly about their own experiences and examine them in relation to various theories or scholarly arguments. How might your own courses change, I asked them, if you acknowledged and celebrated the validity of lived experience as evidence?

My colleagues said that these essays defied their expectations of what “most ESL students” would write. The assessment process helped faculty understand that there is no single, monolithic “ESL,” “L2,” “International,” “Domestic,” or “MLL” student. It was an opportunity to problematize the categories and what it means to categorize. And, important for the WAC program as well as the FTS program, it was an opportunity for these faculty members from different fields to take their experiences back to their colleagues and use them to discuss their own work with multilingual students.

### *Survey Data*

The survey data, while collected within an admittedly small sample group, suggest important implications for peer-response practices. According to the surveys, students reported finding peer-response experiences less useful in the high school setting in classrooms with white, monolingual peers. Yet, students reported that FTS peer-response sessions were both comfortable and helpful, albeit more for global than local issues. It is important to note that the survey did not ask students about their comfort levels in high school peer response sessions. Perhaps pedagogy itself, rather

than the socio-cultural environment, enhanced peer response in FTS. The survey did not ask whether high school teachers prepared them for peer response, nor how often they did this activity or how they were grouped. Further research should be conducted to determine correlations here.

In FTS, on the other hand, students used peer review twice for each major assignment, as well as for a final portfolio editing session. I taught them to use peer response with an hour-long modeling session featuring a former student's example text. Students always received guiding questions and instructions in writing prior to each session. I organized the peer groups after reading an ungraded diagnostic essay in the first week of the course and observed students' interactions with one another for three weeks before assigning groups. This enabled me to group students heterogeneously, ensuring that each group included students who represented a range of fluencies as writers as well as multiple communication styles.

In short, their verbal exchanges with one another and with me were rich and plentiful, and those conversations became the foundation of the course. Our conversation about conventions, for instance, most prevalent during the research project phase of the course, enabled students to question—together, out loud—the rhetorical expectations operating within specific disciplines and across the institution. Those conversations, in turn, helped them reflect on their goals: for example, given the conventions for writing in the sciences and the privileging of laboratory work as a form of evidence, would biology be a good “fit” for me? Or, thinking of others: How could a multilingual education major position herself as an expert in an English language arts class? They helped one another puzzle through these questions, affirming one another's instincts and challenging problematic assumptions.

Unfortunately, these same students described avoiding participation in their other classes across the curriculum. In reviewing November 2012's conference logs, nearly half of the students remarked on their own silence in other classes. They described “freezing” when professors asked questions, afraid they couldn't formulate answers fast enough. They feared other students' assumptions: if they made grammatical errors when they spoke, would their ideas be discounted? If they spoke with an accent, would the professor ask them to repeat themselves? Better to remain silent, they seemed to agree, than risk calling attention to their own linguistic difference. As Alba, an international student from Cancun, Mexico, put it, “In FTS I'm a chatterbox! But I'm not saying much in my other classes.”

During both our individual conference sessions and larger class discussions, students commented upon their sense of community and comfort level with one another in “Why Multi Matters,” often describing their sense of a shared purpose. Most came from families that had endured great hardships in order to get to the US, and in most of their homes, families discussed explicitly the goal of having children obtain a

college education. In the end, 100% reported that they would recommend the class to future multilingual students, writing comments such as: “I felt very welcome in this class,” “I always looked forward to interacting with the instructor and the students,” “The course and instructor really help a bilingual first-year like me feel welcomed,” “I could relate to other people in the class,” and “It’s a great environment.”

I believe their positive experiences with one another contributed to shifts in their self-perceptions. The survey data demonstrate that students trusted one another’s skills and authority, viewing others as successful writers and language users—a crucial shift in subject position for students who are typically positioned as lacking expertise as writers and English users. As Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur suggest, students benefit when we reimagine all language learners as “also language users and creators” (2011, p. 307) in a translingual classroom. Frequent conversation enhanced their collaborative experiences, especially peer response. Their willingness to view group members as knowledgeable and authoritative left them more willing to take one another’s suggestions, trusting that their peers were being honest in their criticism and truly wanted each writer to succeed. This contributed to their overall success with revision. This outcome, I would argue, enabled students to revise their own ways of describing themselves as writers.

### *Conclusion*

I knew that other faculty members would benefit from hearing about the pilot, and the WAC program made it possible for me to talk with others via existing interdisciplinary structures, including WAC lunches and workshops. Thus, in addition to providing social and rhetorical benefits for students, “Why Multi Matters” positively affected some faculty and their First Term Seminars and other WAC courses. As I’ve already explained, for instance, the rubric-based assessment process created a unique faculty development opportunity for the four readers.

One reader was the FTS program director; in turn, she began to pay further attention to the needs of multilingual students in planning a more inclusive and fair FTS registration process.<sup>7</sup> Follow-up discussions helped additional WAC faculty members learn more about reading and responding to multilingual students’ writing, which enriched our ways of talking about all of our students’ work. I presented findings from the pilot several times on campus, enabling faculty to read and discuss the writing of multilingual students. The Provost’s office funded a visit from Michelle Cox, a nationally recognized scholar focused on writing and multilingual students, and her workshop initiated more conversation. The Academic Support Center, Admission Office, and Residential Life offices conferred together, and new initiatives include finding ways to support international students who are stranded on campus over breaks. In sum, the pilot helped us better serve this growing population of students,



reinvigorated our teaching, and it educated staff across campus about challenges faced by multilingual students.

On our second day of class, I used a scenario activity to introduce the concept of *rhetorical situation*, helping students consider the relationship between communicative choices and context. Even though all nine students came from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds—no two students spoke the same first language at home, except for the two Latino students—all nine came up with highly similar responses to my scenario. I asked them, how did they account for similarities in rhetorical approaches despite different cultural and linguistic backgrounds?

One student had a theory: “It’s because we’re all at the same point in our lives wanting exactly the same goal.” This statement helps explain the value of push and pull between heterogeneity and homogeneity in the classroom. Certainly, we recognized rhetorical distinctions in class. Every student brought his or her own culture’s rhetorical assumptions to the table each day, and we discussed them. But students were equally fascinated by the assumptions and experiences that they shared across those cultural differences. What seemed most valuable to the students was their ability to synthesize information and to bring those strategies to bear on critical questions that pertain to all of them, such as: In what ways has your language background been an asset to you in school? What sorts of roadblocks have appeared in your path to college? What strategies have you used, if you’re a first-generation student, to explain the value of your chosen major to your family?

Because the course emphasized the “multi”—multiple languages, multiple literacies, multiple intended majors, multiple voices—students eagerly shared experiences, noting the distinctions, and commenting on similarities. Likewise, the writing assignments helped students think critically about their unique past educational experiences. But these assignments also pointed to ways that, as multilingual people growing up in the US, they might have shared experiences in surprising ways. Articulating individual experiences, interrogating those experiences, synthesizing them into collective experiences, and then interrogating them again became a kind of theory-making for students. “Why Multi Matters” made this work possible by creating two fruitful intersections: first, it was the space where international students, Generation 1.5, and New American students could meet and interact; second, the intermingling of WAC and a translingual pedagogy enhanced students’ work. Teaching at those intersections enabled me to design every aspect of the course to not only acknowledge but highlight the students’ voices and experiences as central to our ongoing conversations about language, identity, culture, and education. Those conversations were possible in part because I entered the classroom assuming that multilingual students have already developed tremendous rhetorical skills and flexibility, which would in turn serve them well as they transitioned to college. In reaffirming their own communicative

competence and highlighting ways in which they can support one another, I sent a clear message: your experience counts, and your presence here matters.

## Appendix A: Writing in First Year Courses: Student Learning Outcomes

### Writing in First Year Courses (FTS and Three Crowns Curriculum)

The First Year writing component promotes writing as a creative and critical process in which writers engage with the ideas of others. In First Year writing courses, students write to express their own ideas and to inform and communicate with others. Good writers make both stylistic and content-based choices to address different purposes, contexts, and audiences. These rhetorical choices help writers make their cases in the most effective ways possible.

**Goals:** In First Year courses, students will

1. Learn to make effective choices as writers, considering purpose, audience, context, and style whenever they write, based on models introduced in the course;
2. Use writing as a means of creative expression and intellectual growth;
3. Cultivate an awareness of the values that inform choices made by writers, themselves, and others;
4. Develop flexible strategies for generating ideas, then drafting, revising, and polishing their writing.

**Criteria:** In First Year courses, students will

1. Have frequent opportunities to write informally as a way to master unfamiliar concepts, explore ideas, and practice techniques for communicating effectively;
2. Engage in a process-based (iterative) approach to writing by having multiple opportunities for planning, drafting and revising their work with instructor and peer feedback;
3. Be guided through at least two formal assignments focused on building skills in critical inquiry, argumentation, and communication to a public audience, using a process-based approach.

### Student Learning Outcomes:

*Student Learning Outcome 1: Students choose effective rhetorical strategies shaped by their appreciation for the purpose, audience, and context for the writing task.*

*Student Learning Outcome 2: Students use writing as a tool to explore ideas, assimilate new knowledge, and reflect on the purpose of their learning.*

*Student Learning Outcome 3: Students use writing to evaluate texts critically and to create arguments that communicate effectively with varied audiences, while acknowledging the limits of their own judgments.*

*Student Learning Outcome 4: Students develop a flexible process for writing that includes self-reflection and strategies for responding to feedback, enabling them to draft, revise and polish written work effectively.*

### Appendix B: Rubric Applied to both First and Final Drafts

1=Paper does not adequately address the criterion; or level of detail/descriptions provided within the paper make it difficult to determine if criterion is met.

2=Criterion is addressed within the paper but with little detail or clarity.

3=Criterion is adequately addressed with some detail and clarity.

4=Mastery of criterion is evident within this paper.

Student Number	THESIS	FRAMING	MAJOR CLAIMS	SUPPORT FOR CLAIMS	COHERENCE	CLARITY AND READABILITY	CONVENTIONS
	The essay offers a specific, arguable thesis that communicates a distinct perspective on a question or a text.	An introduction paragraph gives readers a sense of what is at stake and why it matters, and a conclusion helps readers consider implications for the essay, or leaves us with something to think about after we finish reading.	Essay features major claims that are relevant to the thesis and supported by textual evidence. Ideas are developed, not repeated, so that readers can understand how one claim extends and/or complicates another.	Textual evidence and its relevance are explained clearly. When appropriate, persuasive personal or anecdotal examples are used and explained. Quotations are integrated fully. Quotations are contextualized and introduced well, and they are always cited. Likewise, paraphrased material is integrated smoothly and cited correctly.	The essay leads readers logically from the thesis to the conclusion. Essay features transition sentences that are appropriate and that move the essay forward, developing rather than reiterating main points. Paragraphs are unified so that each paragraph contains a specific focus and sticks to it.	Essay is clear and readable, demonstrating coherence in terms of sentence level issues. If sentence-level errors are occasionally present, they do not interfere with meaning. The essays are carefully edited at the sentence level and reflect careful proofreading at a level appropriate for multilingual students.	Essay includes Works Cited page, organized according to MLA style. Citations in the essay are correct according to the conventions of MLA style described in Lunsford's <i>Everyday Writer</i> , Fourth Edition.
Score							

## Notes

1. The pilot was offered in 2012. I taught the course again in 2013 and in 2015. In 2013, I focused on revising the course readings and assignments; in 2015, I collected data again, this time from a group of sixteen students. During my sabbatical in 2014, another instructor taught the course. For this article, I focused solely on the 2012 students and their data.

2. There is an alternative: a small cohort of students selects the “Three Crowns” curriculum, an integrated core that does not require FTS. Instead, this cohort of approximately sixty students takes a different writing intensive course for the first year.

3. Our institution does not offer composition courses of any kind. We have an established WAC program (since the early 1980s) that requires students to complete three WRITI (writing intensive) or WRITD (writing in the disciplines) courses in order to graduate. FTS is the first WRITI course, intended to introduce students to writing in the college context.

4. After the pilot, I dropped Alexie’s novel, as too many students had already encountered it in high school. I substituted a few short nonfiction essays about higher education and the liberal arts. Likewise, I eventually dropped Kingston as well, moving instead to Lucy Tse’s *“Why Don’t They Learn English?”: Separating Fact from Fallacy in the U.S. Language Debate* (Teachers College Press, 2001). The final research project now uses Tse’s study as a model, and students do qualitative research to focus on heritage language use and loss at home, at Gustavus, or within the community of St. Peter, Minnesota.

5. Ultimately, that piece was excluded from the assessment portion of this research project because the rubric that faculty readers and students used really focused on the development of argumentative writing skills. It’s important to note that the course assessment was not the same as the project assessment: in fact, the project assessment rubric did not enter into the grading process for the course at all, as course objectives were quite different from research project objectives.

6. I served as WAC director from 2000–2005 and as writing center director from 2000–2011. I drew upon my experience in that capacity as I designed the rubric.

7. For instance, prior to 2016, all students at Gustavus registered on campus in June for their first-year courses; those students who arrived on campus earliest in the registration week got “first pick” of FTS sections and other classes. These tended to be students whose parents could easily miss work on a Tuesday or a Wednesday or who were able to make a “vacation” out of the registration week. But those whose parents could only get, at best, a half day off from work on a Friday (or who couldn’t attend at all due to their own work commitments) often found closed sections of FTS courses, labs, or foreign language classes. These students were often first-generation college goers with no knowledge of how course registration might work, including students of color and students from out of state,

many of whom were also multilingual. Influenced by ongoing “Why Multi Matters” discussions, as well as additional data, the Director pursued an online pre-registration option for the FTS program, ensuring that all students, even those who couldn’t afford to travel to campus, could choose FTS topics that interested them.

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