ADAPTING FOR INCLUSIVITY

Scaffolding Information Literacy for Multilingual Students in a First-Year Writing Course

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In early 2015, this author team witnessed and participated in two major shifts at the University of Vermont. The first shift was a new institution-wide foundational writing and information literacy requirement (known as “FWIL”). Remarkable for the sole reason that there had been no university writing requirement until the fall of 2014, this new FWIL creature was also significant in its combining of information literacy and writing into a single one-semester requirement.

The second shift was the university’s embrace of international students as an attempt to both diversify our predominantly white campus and to tap a new revenue stream. When both converged in the fall of 2014, longtime faculty at the university were reeling with new responsibilities for writing and information literacy, compounded by linguistically diverse student audiences whom they felt underprepared to teach. Both of us were hired into this context as the FWIL requirement entered its second semester.

Prior to our arrival, writing faculty and instructional librarians had collaborated on what they hoped would be a shared, standard curriculum for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and instructors teaching English 001, Written Expression. It was a smartly integrated curricular design, moving students through personal inquiry, question-posing, researched literature reviews, and public writing (see Box 17.1). This curriculum addressed the first challenge: how to support faculty efforts in teaching both information literacy and foundational writing in a one-semester course. To address the second challenge, the layering in of international students, we created parallel sections of English 001 designed for our new international students (for a justification of parallel sections, see Braine, 1996). Such courses emphasize the same essential curriculum and student learning outcomes of the standard sections, but often have smaller enrollments to compensate for the labor-intensive nature of responding to multilingual student work. In keeping with the collaborative nature of our program, we collaborated with six other Multilingual Writing Faculty Fellows to alter the standard curriculum in ways that would benefit our growing international student population. This was particularly important in a course with substantial expectations for information literacy.

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**BOX 17.1**  
**STANDARD ENGLISH 001 AT A GLANCE**

**Project 1: Social Narrative**  
Essayistic exploration into multiple perspectives on a social issue in which students have a personal stake  
- emphasizes Research as Inquiry

**Project 2: Question-Posing**  
A series of explorations to investigate a researchable question arising from Project 1 from the perspective of expert discourses  
- emphasizes Searching as Strategic Exploration  
- secondarily addresses Authority Is Constructed and Contextual

**Project 3: Literature Review**  
Literature review using sources from the annotated bibliography; articulating patterns, themes, and trends; and putting those sources in conversation with one another  
- emphasizes Scholarship as Conversation

**Project 4: Public Researched Writing**  
- emphasizes Information Creation as a Process  
- secondarily addresses Information Has Value
The term *multilingual students* indicates a wide range of writers with various linguistic backgrounds, both domestic and international. We like the term for its inclusiveness and for the way it focuses our attention on all students as potentially multiliterate. That said, at our university, the vast majority of our multilingual students are rather newly arrived international students from China. Reid (1998/2011) characterizes students such as ours as having learned English “principally through their eyes, studying vocabulary, verb forms, and language rules” (p. 85). When they arrive in our classes, the majority of our multilingual students have not yet had much experience learning English experientially and through their *ears*. Thus, English as a first language (L1) pedagogies that assume students are already surrounded by oral discourse in English, and hence have a “feel” for how language flows, are especially challenging for non-native English speakers (L2), particularly those who are new to North America. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) provides useful guidelines for designing and teaching writing assignments, which include the following statement:

Discussions on assignment design might include scaffolding, creating benchmarks within larger projects, and incorporating additional resources such as the writing center. Discussions might also include methods for teaching students the multiple rhetorical elements that influence a text’s rhetorical effectiveness, as well as reflections on students’ negotiations between composing in a home country language (including variations of English) and composing in academic English. (Updated in 2009, reaffirmed in 2014)

Supported by these recommendations, we recognized that our situation presented an opportunity to revise the standard curriculum with an aim toward reaching all linguistically diverse students, regardless of their background, their other spoken languages, or their relationship to the United States. Further, we saw the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2015) as especially generative in considering the needs of our multilingual writers. Whereas all six of the ACRL frames align well with Writing Studies (see especially the CWPA Outcomes Statement, 2014, and NCTE’s *Framework for Success in Post-Secondary Writing*, 2013), three frames resonated particularly strongly for us as we embarked on this work: Research as Inquiry, Searching as Strategic Exploration, and Scholarship as Conversation. Our efforts involved providing additional scaffolding for multilingual students—and then we found that our changes benefited all students, regardless of their language background (see also Reid & Kroll [1995] on the importance of scaffolding with L2 writers).

**SOCIAL NARRATIVE TO PROMOTE RESEARCH AS INQUIRY**

The traditional version of the course begins with a “social narrative”—a genre that originates as personal inquiry into a significant issue for the student and imbues it with social and cultural analysis. Throughout the process, students are encouraged to avoid too-easy endings and clichés, probing instead for “un-answers” and “non-conclusions.” Thus, as a first major project, the social narrative
functions to establish and begin practicing a number of the dispositions found in the ACRL frame of Research as Inquiry, particularly to engage in “open-ended exploration,” to “value intellectual curiosity in developing questions” and “intellectual humility,” to “seek multiple perspectives” and “appropriate help,” and to “appreciate that a question may appear to be simple but still disruptive and important” (ACRL, 2015).

Second Language Writing scholars have long urged the Writing Studies community to be wary of uncritically adopting pedagogies designed for native English-speaking students (see especially Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Silva, 1993). In particular, they note that many L1 pedagogies require culturally specific knowledge that our multilingual students may not yet possess, and they make Westernized assumptions about the nature of knowledge-making and revision as an individualistic, competitive, and self-oriented process. Ramanathan and Atkinson (1999) passionately argue that such so-called expressivist pedagogies “advantage those who have been socialized into these practices from an early age according to a highly child-centered, middle-class form of socialization” (p. 64). Further, they contend that in promoting such pedagogies, we make the tacit assumption that everyone is fundamentally like us, so everyone must want what we want. Or, to formulate it differently: Everyone is an individual, but they are individuals on our terms. Surely, this is not a principle that will help us to understand [L2s] on their terms, or that will allow us to use this understanding to help negotiate the complex demands of academic literacy in North American, British, or Oceanic universities. (p. 66)

For our multilingual learners, we felt that the social narrative was crucial not only for avoiding a Westernized personal narrative, but also for shifting students’ expectations away from writing and researching to prove a point; we sought instead to guide them toward writing and researching to inquire and explore. Mindful of the critiques, we designed additional scaffolding that would help our multilingual students practice important foundational information literacy dispositions that we hoped would set up their inquiry research in the next two projects without replicating L1 biases.

In the standard version of English 001, the pedagogy supporting the social narrative is mostly draft-feedback-revise coupled with readings. It has little emphasis on invention, the creation and mining of material prior to drafting. It also demands sophisticated peer review of full texts and repeated commentary on full drafts by the instructor. Spending five to six weeks out of 14 on this first project seemed out of alignment when there were three more projects rich with information literacy to be taught. Thus, our first alteration was to rebalance the sense of scale in order to move on more quickly from narrative to information literacy.

All told, we made three major alterations to the course in order to better scaffold the foundational practices that would lead to a fuller engagement with information literacy in subsequent projects (Table 17.1). The first was logistic: shorten the time span from four to five weeks to three. The second was to build in smaller practices of peer review throughout the project, often as in-class activities, as advocated by Hu (2005). The third was the most radical shift in that it introduced students to a variety of low-stakes invention activities designed to generate multiple
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possibilities rather than asking them to dive into full drafts right away. For example, on the first day of class, students were asked to mine their memories for three moments at different time periods in their lives (birth–6, 7–12, 13–present) in which they experienced some sort of discomfort, cognitive dissonance, or culturally embedded lesson. This simple inventional task prompted them to think beyond their recent adjustment to college abroad, to dig deeper into their memories, and to produce three very different brief paragraphs. Other invention activities followed the same pattern: generate more ideas than you can use, get feedback on them from your peers in class, and build on them with your next assignment. We hoped these curricular changes would help students develop the habit of iterative inquiry.

ANOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY TO PROMOTE SEARCHING AS STRATEGIC EXPLORATION

The next section of the standard course centers around “question-posing,” with the information literacy components focusing on students gathering and evaluating sources with the aim of learning to pose better questions. To understand the complexities of their chosen research topics, students explore and report on researchers’ and experts’ discussions occurring in the scholarship. Through this exploration, research questions are not expected to be answered, but rather investigated and refined through information searching. During this section of the standard course, students receive a one-shot library instructional session and keep a research log asking them to track and reflect on their literature searches. This section encourages several of the dispositions in the ACRL frame Searching as Strategic Exploration, including the ability to “identify interested parties . . . who might produce information about a topic,” to “design and refine needs and search strategies as necessary, based on search results,” to “use different types of searching language appropriately,” and to “manage searching processes and results effectively” (ACRL, 2015).

In the new multilingual course sections, we reconsidered the approach to information literacy instruction and introduction to

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library resources. An increasing awareness exists that information literacy should not be viewed as one size fits all for the different populations of students that librarians encounter in the classroom. Aytac (2016) found that one-shot information literacy sessions are inadequate for L2s’ information literacy acquisition, and calls exist for greater collaboration between librarians and instructors in order to enhance information literacy instruction for these students (Bordonaro, 2015). Furthermore, librarians have suggested that curriculum should take into account students’ language proficiency levels (Amsberry, 2008), cultural backgrounds (Martin, Reaume, Reeves, & Wright, 2012), and past experiences with information (Johnston, Partridge, & Hughes, 2014).

For the multilingual sections of the course, we decided to have students produce an annotated bibliography showcasing their best sources discovered through their searching explorations. In addition to clarifying the end product, we identified two pedagogical moments in need of additional scaffolding: building topical discourse and reading comprehension (Table 17.2).

### BUILDING TOPICAL DISCOURSE THROUGH TERTIARY SOURCES

Asking our multilingual students to immediately immerse themselves in academic discourse surrounding a research question appeared problematic for several reasons. Not surprisingly, language is repeatedly identified as impacting information literacy (Johnston et al., 2014) and obstructing L2s’ library use (Amsberry, 2008; Conteh-Morgan, 2002), and due to their language proficiency levels and past experiences with information, we found that students had neither the vocabulary nor the disciplinary knowledge to delve into information searching. The use of tertiary sources provided one way for our multilingual learners to immerse themselves more gently into the discourse of their topic. For students to understand how and why they might make use of these resources, we first built on their previous understandings of information by discussing their own personal processes for quickly finding information about a topic. Students revealed that they often began the search process with Wikipedia and Google,

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**TABLE 17.2** Question-Posing—Standard and Multilingual

| Week 1 | Forensic readings of a range of researched writing; proposal draft | Keywords from Project 1, tertiary source readings, model annotated bibliographies; begin library online tutorials |
| Week 2 | Keywords and research logs; primary, secondary, and tertiary sources; library online tutorials | Library online tutorials; library visit; revised keywords and research logs; popular and trade sources; more annotated bibliography models |
| Week 3 | Library visit; reverse outlining of sources found | Summaries, paraphrases, and annotations; workshop for clarity |
| Week 4 | Storyboard and process folder | Annotated bibliography drafted, workshopped, and revised |
and this provided an excellent starting point for discussions of the merits of these tools, such as their supply of background information, good organization, ease of reading, and accessible length. Next, students were introduced to tertiary sources—a mix of encyclopedias and reference collections that also contained these identified merits—and as a class, we modeled using them together. The class chose a broad topic (e.g., eating disorders), which was then written on the board. After the group brainstormed any words they already knew related to the topic, students independently explored the different tertiary sources. Any time a student found another word, topic, subtopic, question, or related point within the sources, they added it to the group brainstorm. When the activity was finished, we discussed the new and different entries written on the board and reflected on the development and growing intricacy of our basic knowledge and vocabulary surrounding the topic after allowing ourselves more room and time for lexical exposure. The goal was not yet to explore a question; rather, the goal became to strengthen the grasp of the discourse surrounding the question or the topic in order to more thoroughly prepare students to explore it later in the unit.

**SOURCE SELECTION FOR INCREASED READING COMPREHENSION**

In the standard course sections, students explore the work of specialists writing about their topic through scholarly articles—a process that librarians illustrate in the one-shot information literacy instructional session. However, the majority of the multilingual learners did not have the reading comprehension to delve into scholarly texts. At this point, our multilingual students had already used tertiary sources to build topical discourse, but another step was necessary before students were asked to engage with academic texts. Therefore, we decided to have our students first explore their topics through popular and trade sources. In this step, students were introduced to the debates of experts engaging in scholarship around the topic, but through a more accessible and approachable genre that aligned more closely with students’ reading comprehension levels. Activities such as practice summarization and reverse outlining of the resources helped to further scaffold student understanding of the sources’ strategies and main points. We also reinforced the importance of intermediary evaluation steps to ensure that students were reading beyond the abstract, as Martin and colleagues (2012) observed is a common practice arising from L2 students’ difficulties with academic texts. After this step, we found that some of our highest achieving multilingual students were able to mine information from peer-reviewed scholarly texts.

**LITERATURE REVIEW TO PROMOTE SCHOLARSHIP AS CONVERSATION**

The ACRL frame of Scholarship as Conversation asks students to “seek out conversations taking place in their research area,” to “critically evaluate” these contributions, to “see themselves as contributors to scholarship rather than only consumers of it,” and to do so through appropriate citation and attribution (ACRL, 2015). From the second course unit, the annotated bibliography, students had gathered, read, and summarized sources
on their research question. The challenge now came for students to take these sources from their isolated, alphabetically ordered summaries and put them into conversation with each other in the form of a literature review—arguably one of the most difficult and important types of synthesis writing in nearly any discipline.

For many of our multilingual learners, this genre was entirely new, and it required an elevated level of source synthesis and critical thinking from the annotated bibliography assignment. Here, too, we identified three scaffolding moments not found in the standard curriculum: using a storyboard to map conversational themes and gaps, re-researching in response to those gaps, and repeated workshop of conversational chunks for textual integrity (Table 17.3).

Before asking students to attempt drafting a full literature review, we spent significant time exploring and mapping the thematic organization of literature review examples. In small groups, students collaboratively mapped a course reading and assigned a corresponding number to each source utilized in the text. Then, they gleaned the reading for the main points that the author used to present the story of her research to the reader and wrote each main point on a sticky note along with the corresponding source number(s) illustrating that main point. Students then organized the sticky note main points to reflect how the author organized them in her essay, including headings for each grouping of points. After discussing the organizational strategies used, students considered other possible options for organization that the author might have utilized. Through this visual display, students began to see organizational strategies and had a graphical representation of the source integration throughout the essay to support this organization. Next, students began making storyboards to represent the scholarly conversations arising from their own research. They identified key points from their research, finds such as particular facts, definitions, trends, developments or controversies, and translated these into sticky notes. Then, they experimented with organization, moving the notes around in multiple ways: tracking trends or developments over time, mapping points of support or contrast, or areas of agreement or disagreement, for example. Students were encouraged to try different arrangements, to discuss the impacts of these organizational choices, and to describe the most effective ways to present the scholarly conversations forming around their research questions.

As students began considering the organizational choices involved in integrating their research into a literature review, they also needed to consider the gaps in their research that required additional inquiry and exploration. From their storyboards, students identified where sources failed to “talk” to each other and discussed how these instances pointed to potential research gaps. Students then re-researched in response to these gaps. This process provided students with a more targeted research goal while introducing strategies for identifying weak spots in research and improving them through the iterative research and writing processes.

Whereas storyboards provide an excellent method for helping students visualize thematic connections and disagreements, also revealing gaps that iterate back to researching, they stop short of crafting a blend of researched sources into conversational prose. Putting sources into conversation in prose form presented an important leap, one requiring quite a bit of facility with written English. Here too, extra scaffolding helped our multilingual students
get to where they needed to be, so we developed a three-step in-class workshop.

In the workshop, the class first examined the literature review sections in various articles we had read throughout the semester, which also functioned to model purposeful rereading. Students were each assigned to specific paragraphs and asked first to identify those paragraphs that included more than one source, then share with a partner. Full class discussion began with their simple description: how did they know when a paragraph discussed more than one source? Quickly, they became adept at noticing important markers like parenthetical citations. This may sound patronizingly obvious, but for both L1 and L2 students, parentheses often seem to indicate material they don’t actually have to read—so they skip over it. This simple yet powerful class activity trains their eyes not to skip what is in the parentheses, but rather to make appropriate meaning of it. If the information in one set of parentheses is different from the information in another, then at least two different sources are under discussion. It takes very little time, and once they get it, it sticks (see also Silva, 1997, on the importance of explicitly teaching citation conventions).

After the simple identification of the mere existence of multiple sources in a single paragraph, students looked more carefully at the relationship between those sources. Do they support one another, with one offering further evidence of the other? Do they disagree with one another, with one offering a counterpoint to the other? Do they build on one another, with one agreeing at first and then diverging with new information? In the workshop, students focused on the word choices that indicated the relationship among the sources in that paragraph and reported to the rest of the class by pointing to the exact words and phrases, projected on the big screen.

Beyond the relationship between the sources comes the relationship of the writer to those sources. The third and final step in this in-class workshop asked students to identify the additional framing the author provides around the source material in that paragraph. Where is the setup, and what does that look like? Where is the analysis, and what does that look like? At this moment in the text, is the author presenting multiple views, or is the writer asserting his or her own point?

Class wrapped up with the students returning to their own drafts and color-coding based...
on what they practiced in the workshop. They highlighted their parenthetical citations, circled the phrases that demonstrated relationships among sources, underlined the setup, and italicized their analysis. With this visual, they could see if they were missing any of the elements, and they left class with a very clear revision plan.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Although it was not directly relevant to information literacy, we enacted one additional, crucially important alteration to the course: a true final portfolio. The standard curriculum required students to submit “portfolios” of their work at the end of each unit, which were essentially folders of the work completed. In a true portfolio system, students have the opportunity to reflect on work completed throughout the semester and to revise one more time in light of lessons learned and experiences integrated. True portfolios involve writers’ choices, as they select which pieces to revise in order to showcase and reflect upon a varied range of their abilities and growth (see especially Reynolds, 2014). This final opportunity to revise is particularly crucial for multilingual writers (Leki, 1992; Song & August, 2002).

The purposeful, pedagogical redesigns we have described here afforded our team of Multilingual Writing Faculty Fellows the space and time to devote to collaborative information literacy and writing instruction. As a team, we utilized expertise from a writing scholar, English faculty, ESL faculty, and a librarian to modify the curriculum from a number of different yet connected disciplinary viewpoints. By using ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, specifically the frames Research as Inquiry, Searching as Strategic Exploration, and Scholarship as Conversation, as a lens to ground and guide our curricular modifications, we sought to strengthen the information literacy experiences of our multilingual composition students. This resulted in a redesign rooted in the existing FWIL curriculum but incorporating additional activities in support of students’ language proficiency levels and past experiences with information and writing.

We argue, as do many others before us, that linguistic diversity is a constant in all of our courses, through many of our students. Although our project began as a way to bring international students into our university curriculum, it quickly grew into a way to make our university curriculum more appropriate for all of our students, regardless of their language backgrounds. As Chiang and Schmida (1999) conclude, our too-easy labels and distinctions between native and non-native speakers of English “are inadequate when it comes to capturing the literacy journey of students whose lived realities often waver between cultural and linguistic borderlands” (p. 66). Ultimately, the additional scaffolding designed for both our writing and information literacy pedagogies make these concepts more accessible to all students with wide ranges of linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

REFERENCES

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Reid, J., & Kroll, B. (1995). Designing and assessing effective classroom writing assignments for