Multilingual Academic Writing: Transfer from a Bridge Course

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Course Description

Multilingual Academic Writing is a bridge course designed to prepare multilingual high school students, enrolled in a boarding school, to transition into college writing. The course design outlined here responds to a call by Mark Andrew James to "examine transfer of learning outcomes in a variety of ESL writing instruction settings" ("'Far' Transfer" 80). It also extends existing scholarship in the journal of *Composition Studies* on co-requisite writing (Christie & Gaillet; Heaser & Thoune), knowledge transfer (Fishman & Reiff; Sánchez et al.; Shepherd et al.); multilingual writing (Leonard et al.); and academic writing (Beck; Mallette). The course design outlined here focuses on genre knowledge, audience awareness, and metacognition and on cultivating key writing dispositions, such as exploration and collaboration, for successful writing development and transfer.

Multilingual Academic Writing is a 12-week course that targets two major outcomes: (1) develop students' academic writing skills, and (2) prepare students for college writing. Using open educational resources (OER) and a variety of writing activities and assignments, students practice writing multiple genres, address different audiences, and metacognitively reflect on and evaluate their composing practices. Moreover, students can start building their writerly identities as they embark on writing experiences such as community-based writing and exploratory research writing assignments. These aspects of the course help students develop their writing and transfer writing knowledge to other contexts. I taught this course for transfer purposes to align with students' needs, my goals as an instructor, the school's mission, and the nature of bridge courses (McCurrie). Despite the fact that this is a bridge course design, elements of it may also apply to teaching first-year composition (FYC), which is another context that aims to help students carry on the transition into college writing.

Institutional Context

My teaching of this course took place in 2019 in a summer high-school-to-college bridge program for multilingual students at a private boarding high school in a suburban area on the US east coast. The school's mission for this program is to prepare high school students socially and academically for college life. The school enrolled 190 students from 15 states and 23 countries. Upon matriculating, all students passed a language proficiency exam that in-

cluded a writing section. The 21 students enrolled in this course—13 from China, 5 from Brazil, and 3 from Kuwait—can be split into two groups. The first group consisted of 14 students who had already planned and arranged to study at US universities; the second group consisted of 7 students who planned to study at universities in their home countries. Of the 21 total students in the course, 16 students were admitted to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programs, and 5 were admitted to programs in humanities and social sciences. Given the school's mission—in addition to students' needs to transition into college writing—I felt an obligation to design and teach this course for transfer purposes.

Theoretical Rationale

Studies investigating students' learning transfer across contexts started over a century ago (Woodworth and Thorndike) and the late 1900s were replete with additional studies (Perkins and Salmon); yet the field of composition studies did not take up a serious interest in writing transfer until 2007 (McCarthy; Beaufort "College Writing"; Nelms and Dively). When scholars started exploring students' transfer of writing knowledge, they began with FYC courses as a liminal space (Purdy & Walker; Rothschild) for university writing (*College Writing*; Wardle "Understanding 'Transfer'" & "Mutt genres"; Fraizer). After more than a decade of concentration on writing transfer from FYC, scholars in writing studies still see the importance of studying the nuances of learning and teaching writing for transfer in FYC courses (Cui; Driscoll et al.).

Since the current bridge course is similar to FYC in its mission to introduce and prepare students for college writing, and due to a gap in research about writing transfer in bridge courses, I draw here from research on writing transfer from FYC courses. Current research points out the similarity between bridge courses and FYC. McCurrie investigated the role a basic writing bridge course has on students' performance in college, finding that the course did not prepare students for college writing and that teachers "called for revisions to the curriculum that tied it more closely to the curriculum in first-year writing" (38). Failanga conducted a quantitative study using pre- and post-tests to evaluate the effectiveness of an intensive English course in a summer bridge program, finding that writing was among the skills that students transfer to their introductory writing courses at college, partially due to the similarity of both courses. James interviewed 40 students (all enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course as part of their FYC requirement) to investigate their motivation to transfer writing knowledge to other courses. His findings indicate that students' transfer depends on factors such as "effort to transfer, desire to transfer, and attitudes toward transfer" ("An Investigation"

52). These findings aligns with Driscoll's study of students' attitudes towards writing transfer from FYC, in which she categorizes students in terms of their attitudes as connected, disconnected, and uncertain. Moreover, James examined, through interviews and a writing task analysis, ESL students' writing transfer from an ESL college writing course to a writing task different from the course's content, finding that students exert various levels of effort and transfer knowledge to far contexts in constrained ways due to the struggles of perceived difference across composing tasks ("'Far' Transfer"). Green reports undergraduate multilingual students' perceptions of and transfer from a course that employs "hugging and bridging" strategies to stimulate transfer. He finds that students' successful transfer of writing knowledge is influenced by their positive perceptions of the efficacy of the hugging and bridging strategy.

Even though the field encourages teaching for transfer by offering implications (James "An Investigation" and "'Far' Transfer"), building frameworks (Driscoll), or examining the efficacy of specific strategies (Green), it rarely focuses on teaching-for-transfer practices in bridge courses. Though there is a large body of work on bridge programs generally—for instance, on program effectiveness with respect to retention rates (Barnett et al.; Gonzalez & Garza; Lopez; Failanga)—and though there is a consensus that teaching students writing in bridge programs promotes their academic performance on the college level, how courses support transfer is less clear. In other words, there is still little discussion of how writing courses in bridge programs should be designed to facilitate transfer writing knowledge to college contexts.

To support students' writing transfer, I primarily teach them genre knowledge and audience awareness. Based on conclusions made by many writing transfer studies, genre knowledge plays a significant role in helping students transfer writing knowledge to new contexts (Devitt; Wardle "Mutt Genres"; Rounsaville; Yancey et al.; Driscoll et al.). Cui argues that genre knowledge is a key factor that particularly helps multilingual students develop and transfer their writing to new and different contexts, a finding which holds for studies of L2 writing transfer as well (Kang). Further, students writing in a variety of genres stimulates transfer (Yayli), while writing in genres dissimilar from those they encounter in later writing situations hinders transfer (Leki). The significance of genre knowledge has led Cui to propose a framework to help multilingual students transfer genre knowledge through engaging them in processes of textual analysis, reflection, and genre awareness. Therefore, the current course design engages multilingual students in writing practices and processes that strengthens their knowledge and practices of various genres, which can be transferred to their college courses.

This course design acknowledges the difference between teaching genre awareness and teaching genres (Clark and Hernandez) and focuses on the

former when possible. I rather teach students the dynamic nature of genres combined with other writing practices such as rhetorical appeals and situations. Beaufort suggests that we "teach those broad concepts (discourse community, genre, rhetorical tools, etc.) to give writers the tools to analyze similarities and differences among writing situations they encounter" (*College Writing* 149). Therefore, I teach my students conceptual writing knowledge to promote their understanding of the nuances of academic writing, which can be applied to other writing contexts.

In addition to genre knowledge, research in writing studies has proven that teaching students audience awareness develops and transfers their writing knowledge to other contexts. There are at least three different formats for presenting this to students: considering the classroom as a temporary discourse community (*College Writing*); teaching students to address real audiences, even if they are imagined (Lunsford); and teaching them to write for non-classroom audiences (Driscoll et al.). My teaching of audience awareness in this course extends this research and adds an element of teaching students to address digital audiences on social media platforms. Sasaki et al., via a quasi-experimental method, investigate EFL students' development and transfer of audience awareness through engaging in writing responses on a Social Networking Service (SNS). They found that EFL writers were able to develop their audience awareness through SNS considering genre similarities and students' prior knowledge of audience awareness. This finding underlies this course's approach to having students develop their audience awareness by rewriting a previous reading response into a post on social media. Such an activity helps students reach a deeper understanding of rhetorical situations and practice writing to different audiences.

This course is purposefully designed with specific topics, activities, readings, and assignments to help students in an intensive summer bridge course develop their writing as well as transfer this writing knowledge to new contexts, such as college composition and disciplinary courses. Therefore, this course design is similar to FYC courses that are required in the majority of higher education institutions. This aligns with Perkins and Salmons techniques of hugging and bridging, where teachers address similarities and differences as related to the new learning context, and McCurrie's reporting that "the most significant change was to envision Bridge English as part of the first-year writing curriculum" (11). The bridge I build here aims toward Driscoll's statement that FYC courses then "provide students with functional literacy in academic prose" (1-2) and Rothschild's finding that FYC helps students transition their writing and understanding of writing to the university level, which are similar to this course's learning outcomes.

Inspired by the aforementioned transfer theories, my course includes four major assignments designed to develop students' college writing skills that can be transferred to other writing contexts. That is, my students complete four major writing assignments that are designed with consideration of broad concepts they need for writing success in and outside this course. The assignments are narrative writing, metacognitive awareness, collaborative writing, and exploratory research writing. First, students write a narrative that does not require any research; they can write about themselves, their experiences, and stories. Narrative writing is appropriate to students in this stage because it helps them develop their writing and transfer this writing to other situations (Downs and Wardle 558; Casanave). Furthermore, since research writing includes telling stories, narrative writing is important to prepare students for research writing. This narrative is also used in the second major assignment, metacognitive awareness, where students engage in analytical and reflective practices to learn from their own writing.

The second major assignment in this course focuses on metacognitive awareness. Metacognitive awareness is particularly helpful for L2 students as concluded by DasBender, who finds that integrating metacognitive activities helps her L2 students develop their writing despite facing rhetorical and linguistic challenges. In this assignment, students analyze, reflect on, and metacognitively think of their narrative assignment for the sake of learning more about their writing strengths, weaknesses, and overall performance. The importance of being metacognitively aware writers is that metacognition works in line with writing transfer by helping writers make decisions when they encounter new writing situations. Tinberg states that "metacognition allows writers to assess which skill and knowledge sets apply in these novel situations and which do not" (76). Metacognitive awareness is a threshold concept that helps students critically think of their writing practices, giving them the ability to re-purpose these practices and use them in new writing situations (Taczak).

The third major assignment is collaborative writing and community building. Current research findings indicate that collaborative writing approaches support multilingual students' writing transfer (Teng), adding to other research findings on the importance of collaborative writing (Li & Zhang). This assignment helps students find agency in society by forming smaller classroom communities that resemble real-world onesthey are part of or interested in. These communities can be social, political, economic, athletic, etc. Students are particularly empowered in this assignment as they express thoughts freely and find support from their instructor and peers. This also empowers L2 students by including their backgrounds and cultures through, for instance, writing about communities that do not exist in the US. For this assignment, all members of one community collaborate to write a document that educates the rest of the

class about the values their community holds. This assignment complements Beaufort's idea of considering the classroom a "temporary discourse community" for students to have real audience to write for, and to prepare them to write for the "mega-community" outside the classroom ("Five Years Later"). Through this assignment, students do not only perform as writers, but also as agents who employ writing to serve expanded purposes.

The fourth major assignment is writing an exploratory research project. Through workshops, readings, and activities, students practice exploring a topic of their interest and writing this exploration for a specific audience. This assignment helps students acquire basic knowledge of research writing from finding authentic resources to synthesizing them in concise paragraphs towards an exploratory research essay. This assignment introduces students to research writing, a common genre they will encounter in college.

Briefly, this course design helps students develop their writing and transfer writing knowledge to other contexts as they transition into college. This mission is accomplished through introducing students, using OER, to the broad concepts of writing such as genre knowledge, rhetorical situations, and discourse communities. I teach genre awareness through introducing students to the concept of genre as well as training them to write multiple genres such as narrative, description, reading response, analysis, and research writing. In addition, I teach students about the changing rhetorical situations and writing contexts through familiarizing them with different audiences, such as social media users, and different writing contexts, such as writing collaboratively as a community member. I introduce students to discourse communities by helping them be members of smaller communities in the classroom to share their values through meeting, discussing, and writing with other members. These multiple aspects of this course design help students understand the dynamic nature of writing and, therefore, enable them to re-purpose gained writing knowledge to be used in new contexts.

Critical Reflection

The content of this course is led by readings from OER such as *Writing Spaces*, Writing Commons, and Purdue Online Writing Lab. I did not require textbooks in this course for both accessibility and affordability purposes.

Teaching this course offered unique learning and teaching experiences for my students and myself as a multilingual instructor. My previous experiences of teaching ESL writing were restricted by a curriculum provided to me with specific textbooks to teach for a final exam or a standard five-paragraph essay. For this course, I had freedom to teach the content the way I believe would help students develop their writing as they embark on their college journeys. As I reflected on this experience, I found that my students engaged with and

enjoyed all the elements of the course despite a few challenges (about which more below). Even though this course design has a specific context, its elements can help teachers of multilingual students in a bridge or an FYC course.

I designed this course with specific elements that respond to three concerns pertinent to the teaching of writing in ESL courses in international contexts. First, ESL students are often looked at as struggling to learn the language rather than excelling in this learning. Second, ESL courses often adopt specific textbooks that can prevent creativity and production. Third, the teaching of writing in these textbooks is often through the five-paragraph essay style. (I make these claims about ESL teaching materials as someone who is immersed in ESL courses both as a student and as an instructor.) However, through the design and teaching of this course, students were able to gain linguistic confidence, envision themselves as good writers, and build a writerly identity. Instead of limiting students' creativity to the content of one or more textbooks, the multiple articles from OER helped them engage in deeper conversations about writing. In addition, through reading responses, students were able to understand writing as an individually situated practice. Students wrote and identified many genres beyond the five-paragraph essay and practiced writing to different audiences, which contributed to their growth as writers. The collaborative and community writing assignment played an important role in transitioning students into agents whose writing empowers their voices, rather than students who only focus on grammar and sentence structure. Through reading students' multiple drafts, observing their comments in peer review activities, leading classroom discussions, and reading responses that displayed genre knowledge and audience awareness, I observed their writing development and understanding of conceptual writing knowledge, leading them to make connections to future writing contexts.

Even though this course design worked effectively to prepare students for college writing, it still had some challenges. Because concepts such as audience, genre, and rhetorical situations were new to my students, it took more time than planned to guide students through them. For instance, some of my students expressed confusion in understanding how writing conventions change across genres—such as reading responses and literacy narrative writing. In addition, my students encountered difficulty reading through some of the articles in the reading assignments. They specifically expressed some difficulty due to unfamiliarity with this type of articles; this is a problem noted in other curricula, such as Writing about Writing, that use academic articles (Downs and Wardle). In response, I revisited my list of required reading and replaced difficult articles with simpler ones. After discussing with students, I removed articles that they believe were long, overused jargon, and did not have headings to facilitate their reading. I also encountered a challenge as students were

expressing their interests in joining groups/communities for assignment three. Some students were alone in their interest in a community, which would have precluded them from doing the group portions of the project. I asked if they could join other groups focusing on communities that interested them, and most students did. However, one student still did not find any group focusing on a community of interest to him. I offered to be his group member and completed assignment three with him. This resulted in a deeper engagement for me in assignment three since I played the role of a student. Such challenges motivated me to make helpful revisions to this course design.

What I present in the online materials accompanying this piece is my revised course design. I made three major revisions after this initial experience First, I updated the required readings list, as mentioned above. Second, I incorporated in-class reading workshops to further assist students. Because some students encountered difficulty with some readings, I believe in-class reading workshops, where students read individually and in groups and engage in full-class discussions, can develop their understanding of readings and teach them reading skills. Third, I incorporated in-class writing workshops as a result of students' interest in starting their writing assignments in the class. These workshops support students with immediate help from me or one of their peers whenever they experience difficulty understanding parts of a reading or encounter writer's block.

And, of course, because every writing course has students with different needs, this course design can always be updated to better fit students' needs and increase their learning outcomes in local institutional contexts.

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