Journal of Writing Assessment

Horton, A.E. (2022). Two sisters and a heuristic for listening to multilingual, international students' directed self-placement stories. *Journal of Writing Assessment,* 15(1). **DOI: 10.5070/W4jwa.222**

Two Sisters and a Heuristic for Listening to Multilingual, International Students' Directed Self-Placement Stories

Analeigh E. Horton, University of Arizona, US, analeighhorton@arizona.edu

Abstract: Directed self-placement (DSP) is considered useful in linguistically and culturally diverse writing programs, but questions of self-efficacy and institutional knowledge sustain hesitancy in using DSP with English as an additional language (EAL) writers. This interview study grounded in sociocultural literacy theory explores multilingual, international students' engagement with writing placement and courses, showcasing two quadrilingual, bicultural, international student sisters, Hemani and Kavya. Despite nearly identical linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds upon concurrently entering a writing program, they experienced DSP differently and enrolled in different sections: Hemani in mainstream and Kavya in EAL courses. Hemani shares DSP's positive impacts on her writing program trajectory whereas Kavya's story uncovers lost opportunities and feelings of otherness. Findings affirm that multilingual, international student placement is complex and that DSP is highly contextual. This study highlights DSP's mission of building student agency as motivation for collecting primary data so marginalized students can explain DSP's effects on their identity and development. Responding to the need for empirical research of EAL writers using DSP, the analysis considers effects of placement and offers a heuristic for examining placement experiences across contexts.

Keywords: directed self-placement, multilingual writers, placement, agency

At a writing program administrator (WPA) meeting serving a land-grant R1 state university, we began discussing our most recent iteration of directed self-placement (DSP) and improvements for the next year, wondering how to help students utilize their ability to choose their own writing course through our DSP process. DSP is designed to acknowledge each student that enters a writing program, but in our program annually serving 6,000 students across seven foundational writing courses, this proves challenging. There is tension between wanting to support students individually and logistically easier moves of placement by test score or visa status. Time pressures of placing incoming students between terms, lack of resources to meet with every student, and institutional pushes for tighter budgets and quantitative data are realities challenging the mission of DSP, which compels us to take an individualized approach. "Our old concerns about validity and reliability," write DSP architects Royer and Giles (1998), "are now replaced with something akin to 'rightness.' And the rightness of the choice now lies with the student, where we feel it belongs" (p. 62). Subsequently, our aims towards best practices encourage continued use of DSP. To analyze its implementation, case study research, while not offering the most comprehensive understanding of a 6,000-student program, embodies DSP's intentions and helps close the loop of an individualized experience. Drawn from an inaugural process of placing international students through DSP, I present experiences of two quadrilingual, bicultural, international student sisters, Hemani and Kavya, whose stories illuminate the lived experiences of placement, enrollment, and literacy development.[1] Their narratives, shared to highlight emic voices of international students that have gone largely unheard in DSP research, explore the complex social and linguistic landscape of their writing program journeys.

Meeting Hemani and DSP

I met Hemani in Fall 2019. It was my first semester in a rhetoric, composition, and the teaching of English doctoral program. At my previous university where I studied for a master's in applied linguistics and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), I taught the "international" writing sections. As a first-year grad student at my new school, I was slated to teach a "mainstream" writing course, which was my first time teaching such a class. There, I met Hemani. Although I was teaching the course designed for domestic students whose lives had been lived in an English-speaking United States (US), Hemani was an international student from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The class also had two students raised in Mexico, several Generation 1.5 students of Mexican descent, a student from Jamaica, a disabled student whose first language was American Sign Language, and an Indigenous American student who was raised on a Reservation. In my class of 18 supposedly all domestic, native English speakers (and the connotation of whiteness that carries), 10 came from diverse linguistic, cultural, and/or national backgrounds.[2]

While contemplating how these students ended up in my class and considering my own positionality of being, albeit multilingual and well-traveled, a white, L1 English teacher from the US, I first heard of DSP. I wondered how DSP accounted for cultural and linguistic nuances and articulated the research question: How do multilingual and international students experience the process and their identity in DSP and the courses that follow?

1Pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities.
2This project was approved by the University of Arizona's Institutional Review Board (protocol #2005676732).

DSP for Multilingual Writers

Historically, EAL (English as an Additional Language) students have not had much say in what writing classes they take. Generally, the available courses are ones designed for native English speakers or students who are not, a classification generally assumed by citizenship. Saenkhum (2016) characterizes this placement practice as rendering EAL students as "sort of aimless and passive, being moved around by various authority figures at their universities" (p. 4). As Crusan and Ruecker (2019) argue, most teachers lack assessment literacy, especially for assessing second language writing; assessment is thus challenging and often unreliable (Rubin & Williams-James, 1997). Matsuda and Silva (1999) refer to the traditional placement method as a "sink-or-swim approach" (p. 17). Saenkhum (2016) encourages challenging this custom by asking students what they want and promoting agency and understanding in their placement decisions but confesses that there is little empirical evidence on how to implement new methods.

While writing and EAL studies have considered self-placement since the 1980s (e.g., Hackman & Johnson, 1981; LeBlanc & Painchaud, 1985), Royer and Gilles' (1998) article, "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation," is largely recognized as DSP's foundational scholarship. Using Deweyan (Royer & Gilles, 1998) and Freirean (Royer & Gilles, 2003) ideologies supporting democratic and liberatory processes, DSP invites writing students to decide their own placement, theoretically granting students more agency, empowering self-responsibility, improving student experience, and motivating students to prove themselves correct in their self-assessment (Moos & Van Zanen, 2019; Saenkhum, 2016; Toth & Aull, 2014). However, self-placement, especially for multilingual writers (Saidy, 2018), raises questions about students' self-knowledge, understanding of the process and courses, and self-efficacy (Condon et al., 2001; Crusan, 2006, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Furthermore, it can be challenging to operate within institutional structures, create a welcoming environment, and deliver content for multilingual writers (Matsuda & Silva, 1999), making placement decisions more difficult (DasBender, 2011; Ferris & Lombardi, 2020; Ruecker, 2011). DSP tries to mediate these concerns by letting students choose which situations they enter into, but it is not a fix-all solution (Crusan, 2011; Royer & Gilles, 1998).

These challenges are perhaps reasons why multilingual and international students are yet to be routinely accounted for in DSP practices and research. Toth (2019) writes that despite writing assessment theorists' wide acceptance of DSP as a placement method, investigations into the design and validation of DSP have not systematically examined multilingual students' experiences. However, Ferris and Hedgcock (2014) encourage implementing dynamic assessment for second language writers, a Vygotskian-informed method that seeks to "gauge and advance the learning potential of individual learners and to devise appropriate educational strategies" (Antón, 2012, p. 106). Although Inoue (2009) demonstrates DSP's effectiveness in programs featuring linguistically and culturally diverse students and the CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing (2020) highlights DSP as a prudent placement method, empirical research on multilingual, international writers and DSP is largely missing (Crusan, 2011; Ferris et al., 2017). Tardy (2011) urges WPAs to analyze their local contexts as sociolinguistic needs vary across populations, and DSP is consistently called to be locally tailored (Gere et al., 2010; Gere et al., 2013; Huot, 2002; Inoue et al., 2011). Canagarajah (2011) encourages agency, choice, and multilingualism to be viewed as an asset; this case study aims to see if students' writing program experiences embody this position.

Methods

Institutional Context

The University of Arizona (UArizona) is Arizona's flagship land-grant institution located one hour north of Mexico. UArizona is designated as a Hispanic-Serving (HSI) and American Indian and Alaska Native-Serving (AIANSI) Institution. In the 2019-2020 academic year in which data was collected, UArizona enrolled 45,918 students, with 3,780 total international students and 10,171 new undergraduates (including transfer), of whom 517 were classified as international (University Analytics, 2020). The Foundations Writing Program served nearly 6,000 students, most of whom were first-year students. In Fall 2019 and Spring 2020, respectively, there were 808 and 643 international students. Incoming undergraduates must complete the two-semester sequence of Foundations Writing to fulfill general education requirements (see Table 1) (English, n.d.).

Table 1

Foundations Writing courses at UArizona

ENGL 106	ENGL 101/101A/107	ENGL 102/108	ENGL 109H
Students needing additional language support before the two-semester sequence (ENGL 101/107 and 102/108) may take ENGL 106, which focuses on language choices.	These courses emphasize the social and situated nature of writing. Students may take ENGL 101, 101A, or 107. ENGL 101A features studio writing time, carrying an additional credit hour.	These courses emphasize rhetoric and research across contexts. Students may take ENGL 102 or 108.	Students may take ENGL 109H instead of ENGL 101/107 and 102/108, completing the sequence in one semester.

Note. ENGL 106, 107, and 108 are intentionally designed for EAL international *students (English, n.d.)*

Frequently at UArizona, ENGL 101 and 102 are paired together as are ENGL 107 and 108. Although these classes fulfill the same learning outcomes and feature similar readings, projects, and instructors, the campus culture surrounding these courses is that ENGL 101 and 102 are the "mainstream" courses meant for domestic students with English proficiency whereas ENGL 107 and 108 are designed for international EAL students. The course descriptions on the 2019 DSP questionnaire specify that ENGL 107 and 108 are

> designed specifically for students writing in English as an additional language, and address language-related concerns in class and through individualized feedback as needed. Instructors may also draw on students' multilingual resources to support writing and language development.

The Writing Program's website (English, n.d.) writes that ENGL 107 and 108 are "designed for international students and taught by instructors with a background in second-language teaching."

Placement Process

UArizona's Foundations Writing Program first implemented DSP in 2018. This study's participants completed the 2019 iteration, which was the first year that international students

were included. International students had previously been automatically placed in ENGL 106, 107, or 108 based on test scores. The 2019 DSP process required incoming Foundations Writing students to take an online placement survey: domestic students received the Writing Placement Questionnaire (WPQ) whereas international students received the Foundations Writing Evaluation (FWE). Students were pre-identified by the university as domestic or international by visa status. Both the WPQ and FWE were designed by WPAs; EAL writing specialists contributed specifically to the FWE.

The WPQ and FWE both described Foundations Writing courses (ENGL 101, 102, 107, 108, and 109H) and the FWE also described ENGL 106. The questionnaires featured similar questions about educational experiences and writing competencies. The FWE requested standardized test scores; UArizona's placement is a multiple methods assessment.

After completing their questionnaire, students automatically received a placement recommendation. Students were placed into bands (either 1, 2, or 3) but this was only known by administrators:

- Band 1: Students likely need high support. The placement decision is final. Students with an ENGL 106 placement are automatically placed into Band 1.
- Band 2: Students likely need moderate support. The placement recommendation is strongly encouraged, but students can self-place.
- Band 3: Students likely need minimal support. The placement recommendation is encouraged, but students can self-place.

The banding process was the same for students regardless of taking the WPQ or FWE. A difference, however, was that, per the programming of the FWE, respondents were almost always recommended to ENGL 106 or 107. They could never, unlike domestic WPQ users, be recommended to ENGL 109H and were rarely recommended to ENGL 101. Whereas some students, regardless of taking the WPQ or FWE, were explicitly told to meet with a Writing Program Placement Advisor at orientation (for sundry reasons, like more information was needed to make a recommendation), all students were notified that Placement Advisors would be at orientation should they want a consultation prior to enrollment. Placement Advisors were trained graduate students and contingent faculty who taught Foundations Writing courses. WPAs and Placement Advisors routinely reviewed the algorithmic recommendations as students submitted their responses to monitor the tool's validity and reliability.

Recruitment and Data Collection

Following my piqued interested in DSP in Fall 2019, I spent the spring working through IRB. I had to change my entire project when COVID-19 swept the US; I did not get approval until May. When I was finally able to contact teachers to recruit participants, many replied that multilingual students had research participation fatigue even before the pandemic and they did not feel comfortable soliciting even more participation at the end of a nightmarish semester. Subsequently, my original email solicitation method (which mentioned monetary compensation) fell short, but I still recruited five participants.

When U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement (ICE) imposed policies regarding nonimmigrant student visas, four participants withdrew from the study. I had not originally contacted my own students to avoid uncomfortable power relations, but following this attrition, I revised my protocol to convenience sampling and reached out in June. I emailed Hemani,

checking in on how she was doing during such a hard time and gently requesting an interview about her Writing Program experiences. She responded quickly, expressing excitement to break the monotony of starting at the cinder block walls of the dorm room she was still living in because, due to the pandemic and US foreign policies, she was unable to return home to Dubai for the summer.

I interviewed Hemani via Zoom. We began by catching up, explaining my research, and then asking some prepared questions. Towards the end of the 30-minute interview, she compared her experience to her sister's. I admitted that I had forgotten she had a sister and assumed that, since Hemani had just finished Foundations Writing that most students take as first-years, her sister was older. I remembered that Hemani was a sophomore transfer student as she explained that her sister was a first-year student who had also just finished Foundations Writing. Thrilled by stumbling into a kairotic moment, I asked if Kavya might speak with me. A week later, I interviewed Kavya, who had been equally bored in isolation and was happy to participate. In Hemani and Kavya's individual interviews, I used the same semi-structured interview procedure to guide our discussion but let their interests and perspectives drive the conversation.

Participants

Hemani, 19, and Kavya, 18, are sisters who were born one year apart. Their parents emigrated from India to Dubai, UAE, where they were born and raised, though they primarily identify with their Indian heritage.

They attended primary and secondary school in Dubai. Kavya recounted that their high school used Arabic, the UAE's official language, but all her classes from elementary through high school used English. Their teachers were mostly from India, so Hemani explained that they learned Indian English, but their curriculum was modeled after US educational practices. Kavya mentioned that from Grades 1-10, they also wrote in Hindi.

Because of their upbringing, they have considerable experience using Arabic, English, Hindi, and Malayalam. They both expressed that they feel proficient but not fluent in Arabic and that they lack strong writing proficiency in Hindi. At home, although the entire family speaks English, they almost exclusively speak Hindi and Malayalam with their parents, but the sisters almost always use English with each other. Overall, they self-described as native or near-native speakers of English, Hindi, and Malayalam and proficient writers in English and Malayalam.

In Fall 2018, Hemani, the older sister, began university in Dubai. When Kavya wanted to move to the US to study in UArizona's engineering program, their parents thought it would be best for the sisters to go together. In Fall 2019, Hemani began at UArizona as a sophomore transfer student and Kavya began as a freshman; they were both classified as international students. They both enrolled in Foundations Writing.

Methodology and Analysis

Ruiz (2016) asks, "How can we facilitate the political entrance of these students into the academy without asking them to negate part of themselves?" (p. 112)—a crucial question for increasingly internationalized writing programs (Benda et al., 2018). Sociocultural literacy perspectives prioritize students' voices, which is important for multilingual writers who regularly face agency-denying norming through monoglossic language ideologies, especially in the academy (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Horner (2001) cites Rodby (1992) who defines literacy as "'a human practice

through which self, nation, community, and language are defined simultaneously, in a mutually dependent manner'" (p. 751). Horner (2001) explains that this theory of literacy

> productively counters reifications of the writer's social identity and of language practices, or communities, as homogenous entities to which writers either do or do not belong, and grants agency to writers in defining, or rather, redefining and revising themselves, their communities, and their languages. […] What we need […] is a theory of pedagogy and language and power that accounts for the interplay between writing, agency, social identity, and power: that takes writing as material social practice. (p. 751)

Sociocultural literacy as a theoretical orientation thus accounts for factors like "institutionalization, globalization, ideological dominance, beginner-expert relationships, transnational blurring of boundaries, and massification of higher education" (Donahue, 2009, p. 234) and helps negate the myth of linguistic homogeneity (Matsuda, 2006). This framework recognizes the challenging contexts students navigate.

If we acknowledge the relationship between performativity, writing, and humanity (Fishman et al., 2005) and consider DSP as a literacy experience that is socially and culturally bound (Ramdas, 2001), we should investigate how writing programs require students to perform certain roles and how DSP allows them to choose what roles they play. Schendel and O'Neill (1999) affirm DSP's potential affordances but argue that "to make a claim for validity, research needs to address the social, material, and theoretical consequences of directed self-placement for students and the programs using the procedure" (p. 217). Calling for social, material, and theoretical consequences is a large request, but useful for analyzing DSP as a potential sponsor of literacy and literate identity development (Brandt, 1998), particularly for Hemani and Kavya's divergent experiences.

When conducting and coding the interviews, I drew from "pedagogical memory" (Jarratt et al., 2009, p. 49) theory to highlight literacy and its consequences. Jarratt et al. (2009) recommend this strategy for interview research because it enables participants to practice remembering, which they describe as an "act of participation, a placing of oneself in a story in a particular way" (p. 49). I encouraged Hemani and Kavya to share what they did—or, importantly, did not—remember about their experiences and situated my analysis in what memories they recalled and how they recalled them. Inductive coding supported my goal of emic research. I developed a codebook from the two interviews:

- Biographical information: information about upbringing and student status
- DSP questionnaire: memories of placement evaluation
- Placement Advisor: memories of meeting with an advisor
- Language use/linguistic identity: feelings about language and multilingual self
- Writing/writing identity: feelings about writing and writerly self
- Course decisions: what classes they enrolled in and why
- Course experiences: how they interacted with Writing Program classes

These codes organized Hemani and Kavya's timelines, tracked meaningful moments of development, and documented how they impacted the participants.

Findings

The following narratives from Hemani and Kavya, organized into placement and course experiences, explore how these two multilingual, international students experienced DSP, their Writing Program courses, and resulting identity development. Their memories detail their

engagement with these processes, showing how they differently gained institutional knowledge and developed as multilingual, multicultural writers.

Placement Experiences

Hemani: "It Was My Choice"

Hemani, the older sister, did not take a university writing course in Dubai, so upon transferring to UArizona, she needed to take Foundations Writing. When I asked her to describe placement, she did not remember much. She did not remember the FWE until I showed her a screenshot of it. Although she reported that the FWE "was pretty helpful," she said much more about her Placement Advisor:

> I was put in the international English class first. But then I went to meet with someone at the university when I first came in, and she suggested that I could enroll in the 101 instead of the international class. I remember that. She recommended that if I wanted to talk with more students, local students, like from America, and like, know more about the American culture and stuff, then I should enroll in 101 or if I wanted to, like, be more in my comfort space and be with students who were international just like me, then 107 will be better. But I prefer, like, coming into 101 because I thought it'd be like, yeah, better to, like, know more about the American culture.

I asked if she would have gone against her ENGL 107 placement recommendation and enrolled in ENGL 101 had she not met the Placement Advisor. Hemani responded, "I would have taken 107. Definitely." She described how the recommendation felt more like a mandate until the Placement Advisor explained that it was Hemani's choice. Hemani recounted the Placement Advisor articulating the differences between ENGL 101 and 107 and repeated, "[The Placement Advisor] gave me a choice" and "it was my choice" to reiterate that she understood she was choosing her own course. Following ENGL 101, Hemani enrolled in ENGL 102. She never desired to take the EAL sections, ENGL 107 or 108.

Kavya: "I Wasn't Aware About This"

Kavya, the younger sister, began her college career at UArizona, so, like most first-year students, she began in Foundations Writing. She vaguely remembered a questionnaire. When I showed her the FWE screenshot, she more fully remembered it, but could not recall the recommendation. She explained, though, that she took ENGL 107 and 108 and therefore assumed that this was the recommendation because she did not know of any other alternatives. Kavya explained that at orientation, she met an advisor, but could not identify as them as a Placement Advisor; the person she described seemed more like a general academic advisor.

> Kavya recalled being unaware that international students could take other sections until halfway through her first semester:
>
> Analeigh: So, when you went to register for your classes, why did you register for 107?
>
> Kavya: I wasn't aware about [a choice]. Um, so my sister, she enrolled in the 101 and then she told me about it. So that's how I came to know and that was it.
>
> Analeigh: So, when did you find out that there were 101 and 102 sections?
>
> Kavya: I was halfway through, like, my own 107 class, so I couldn't really change or whatever.

> Analeigh: You would have, though? Can you talk a little bit more about why you would have changed?
>
> Kavya: Um, because some of the writing assignments—I feel like I was a bit better in this course, in 102, so probably it was for that that I would have liked to have switched.

As Kavya did not learn about ENGL 101 until after the add/drop period, she could not switch into it from her EAL course, ENGL 107. When registering for the second semester, Kavya assumed that because she took ENGL 107, she had to take the next EAL course, ENGL 108, instead of taking the mainstream ENGL 102. Kavya therefore enrolled in ENGL 108 without consulting anyone on this decision.

Course Experiences

Hemani: "All of my Writing Classes Were Great"

Hemani reported positive impressions of ENGL 101 and 102. She expressed an initial transition period from her Dubai-based schools to Foundations Writing curriculum, explaining that her English education in Dubai focused on oral communication:

> It was a bit different because we didn't have to write a lot of essays [in Dubai]; it was more communication-based. So, we would, like, have more group discussions and, like, stuff like that. We were learning more about, like, communication, like professional communication. So, in that way, it was different [from UArizona's writing classes].

She also commented on the transition from high school to college writing, noting more work in academic genres in Foundations Writing than she had done before. She believed this academic literacy learning would be helpful for her future writing. I asked, "Do you think that in your future classes that aren't writing-explicit classes, that you'll still be getting writing instruction, or that you'll be kind of expected to already know how to write different things and write proficiently in English?" Hemani responded, "I think we will get instructions for it, but I'd be comfortable working without it, too," conveying confidence in her Foundations Writing preparation.

Following up on her expectations, I asked about experiences being multilingual and international in the mainstream ENGL 101 and 102 classes. When asked if she experienced linguistic prejudice or xenophobia, Hemani answered that she neither experienced these judgments from her peers and instructors nor had she expected to. Her multiculturalism was beneficial in Foundations Writing:

> Yeah, knowing multiple languages was helpful. Yeah, it was. Like, I don't know. I guess it was more of a cultural thing. Like, I could use most of my different cultural aspects in the class and, like, talk more about it, so it was much easier. There were a bunch of essays [in ENGL 101] about my own experiences, so it was easier. Yeah, that was more helpful.

These positive experiences led Hemani to describe Foundations Writing as "a fun experience. Like, all of my writing classes were great. Yeah, I enjoyed it a lot" and that she "definitely" recommended that international students take ENGL 101 and 102, especially if they were interested in US culture. Overall, Hemani felt comfortable in ENGL 101 and 102 and never regretted selecting these sections over the EAL ones.

Kavya: "I Was in the International English Course"

Kavya also had a generally positive experience in her EAL courses, ENGL 107 and 108, but repeatedly wondered what the mainstream courses were like. Kavya described most of her ENGL

107 peers as being from East and Southeast Asia and most of her ENGL 108 peers as being from the Middle East. She explained that being with students from similar cultural backgrounds was comforting, but that the differing language proficiencies sometimes hindered her studies. Kavya self-identified as being in the middle of her class's English proficiency:

> Kavya: There were people on different levels. Some of them weren't really fluent in reading, but others were, like, really good at writing. So, it's all different kinds.
>
> Analeigh: And where would you say you were in that group?
>
> Kavya: Um, probably in the middle, because my writing wasn't that great. But by the end of it, it got way better than I was at the beginning. And reading, I'm pretty good with that.
>
> Analeigh: So, how do you feel that you developed as a writer over time? How do you feel you got better?
>
> Kavya: To me? I think I wasn't really rhetorically aware, but after this course, it was really helpful for me after all the assignments that we did and stuff, so those [helped me get better].

Kavya, like Hemani, noted the different emphases of oral communication in Dubai versus academic writing in Foundations Writing as well as the transition from high school to college writing. She explained that rhetorical awareness was a guiding theme in both ENGL 107 and 108.

Kavya said that her instructors acknowledged students' multilingual and international identities and urged them to resource those experiences to inform their rhetorical awareness, but that being multilingual and international were not overt foci of her EAL classes. She described one of her favorite Foundations Writing experiences as being her ENGL 108's service-learning Wildcat Writers partnership where her class connected with a local high school class. Kavya enjoyed the partnership's affordances for learning US culture and meeting people from Tucson. Her placement in ENGL 107 and 108 reminded her, though, that she was not from the US:

> I was just kind of always aware of being an international student because it was mostly international students around me, so that made me recognize, like, "Oh, I was in the international English course." It was kinda nice because I could relate to a lot of people in my class with English skills and everything else, but I was still aware of that [status].

Despite her fairly positive impression of ENGL 107 and 108, Kavya couched this review with, "I would have liked to have switched" to ENGL 101 and 102.

Sharing Class Experiences

In their individual interviews, the sisters described largely different placement and course experiences where they did—or did not—encounter literacy sponsors, but a shared character in their stories was each other. Hemani and Kavya both described her sister as the person with whom she spoke about her writing classes. They realized through these conversations that they were in different courses: Hemani in the mainstream classes and Kavya in the EAL ones.

They compared their writing courses. They noted that while the class structure was generally the same with three or four major projects and a final portfolio each term, the day-to-day learning was relatively different. Hemani recalled her classes featuring more personal writing and a looser structure:

> We had a lot of, like, free time to, like, just think in class and, like, write a lot and we could communicate. We were assigned partners, as well, so we could talk a lot with them, and it was really comfortable to write. Yeah, I liked that class.

Hemani mentioned that this collaborative writing contributed to her feeling that she had made the right choice in electing ENGL 101 and 102 for the ability to interact with more students from the US. Kavya conversely did not report routine collaborative writing opportunities. Kavya explained that, compared to Hemani's, her course was much more focused on writing for students' future academic and professional careers. Despite these differences, Kavya said that activities "like peer review and going to conferences after a main assignment" were common in all their courses and that they experienced more similarities between Hemani's 102 and Kavya's 108 coursework, but that Hemani's 101 and Kavya's 107 assignments were largely different.

Kavya in particular lamented not having the same experiences as Hemani. She explained that, had they both been in the mainstream classes, "It just would have been more thought-provoking and exciting." In this way, Hemani acted as the picture of what could have been for Kavya: "In Hemani's classes, it was different." While Kavya hedged that she enjoyed and learned from her EAL courses, she repeated her wish to have been able to not just hear Hemani's experiences, but to live them for herself. She recounted that, had she known about ENGL 101 and 102, "That would have been helpful. And I would have probably chosen all 101 and 102." Over their year of conversations about projects, activities, and learning environments in their different classes, they entrenched their beliefs about ENGL 101 and 102 as their shared preference, and their reflections illuminate the long-lasting implications of placement.

Discussion

Hemani and Kavya's stories of two people with essentially identical educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds having two relatively different experiences in the same foundational writing program are reasons for pause. There is, however, a missing data point that could potentially answer the question of how this happened. Our placement office could pull their DSP responses, see their brand placement, and consider if that was why their experiences differed. Although they both received, to the best of their memory, the EAL course as their recommendation, maybe Hemani's responses placed her into Band 3, where her ability to choose was freely available. Maybe she was placed into Band 2 and was more thoroughly encouraged to meet with a Placement Advisor who explained her choices. Perhaps they had the same recommendation and band but just reacted differently to the information. The reality is that, even though the sisters have so many similarities, they ultimately took their questionnaires individually and separately responded to the recommendations and advising; knowledge of their DSP questionnaire responses could provide insight into how those things happened and is therefore an opportunity for future research.

At the present recounting of their stories, though, I am deliberately not requesting these records. That insider knowledge would further separate me as a researcher-administrator and distract from Hemani and Kavya's stories. Students never even know a banding process exists, much less its effects on their responses. If this project aims to understand student engagement with DSP, it is necessary to mimic their funds of knowledge, incomplete as they may be. Although this lack of knowledge may be perceived as a limitation to the study, to empathize with students, we need to see through their eyes, living their experiences through their recollections.

Hemani and Kavya offer glimpses into the individual contexts that comprise the Writing Program. Although this project began as an exploration into the placement process alone, their narratives uncover the ripple effect it creates. Hemani and Kavya's emphasis on their course experiences, although informed by placement but not focalizing (or even remembering, for that

matter) the placement process itself, points to needing to examine the full outcome of placement within students' lived experiences. This makes it hard to quantify, but embraces literacy-as-social practice, recognizes placement and course experiences as highly circumstantial, and welcomes students to reflect upon and make connections between their identities and involvement in a writing program. I consequently revel at the rich insights this data provides for my own institution but recognize that it cannot be extrapolated to terribly generalizable conclusions, and thus offer the method to be taken up and refashioned in other contexts.

Namely, I present the following heuristic for analyzing students' stories. Prioritizing inquiry centered on literacy development, WPAs can look at the "social, material, and theoretical consequences" of their program's practices to consider if and how students identify as agents of their own educational experiences (Schendel & O'Neill, 1999, p. 217). For Hemani and Kavya, I apply this heuristic in the following way:

> **Social**: Hemani and Kavya both reflected on their social locations of being multilingual and international. They were each aware of these identities but experienced them differently. Hemani's multilingual and international identity felt unique in the mainstream course. Luckily, she did not experience xenophobia and perceived her differences as strengths that inspired her writing. Kavya was one of an entire class of multilingual, international students. Whereas this group membership may sometimes be helpful, Kavya explained that the course reminded her of her otherness, and she felt like she was missing opportunities for cultural learning. The social consequences of enrollment in the different courses were directly tied to their senses of belonging in different discourse communities. Another important social variable is Kavya's relationship with her sister. Had she not learned from Hemani about ENGL 101 and 102, would she still have felt so "different" in ENGL 107 and 108? Lastly, did Hemani report such positive experiences in her courses because the researcher was her former ENGL 101 teacher? This allowed for a quicker sense of rapport but also potentially enhanced a power dynamic, which could have been reinforced by our disparate language and racial backgrounds. It also leads to wondering how the demographics between students and advisors impacts students' reactions to what advisors recommend. Certain cultures may compel students to follow advisors' recommendations regardless of their sense of self-placement. These questions demonstrate how social factors can influence students' perceptions of their position within discourse communities across time, from placement to enrollment to post-course reflection. Social variables are all the more important to examine when considering marginalized students' experiences.
>
> **Material**: Two materials arise as consequential for Hemani and Kavya. First, the advisor meeting arises as the main material product of their DSPs. Although the questionnaire may seem like a more obvious material, the sisters' lacking memory of it suggests it as inconsequential in their personal experiences. That is not to say that the questionnaire did not have consequences, but that it was not relevant in their remembrance of placement. Hemani did not remember the questionnaire at all but spoke highly of her conversation with her Placement Advisor. Kavya, although only vaguely remembering some type of questionnaire and advisor, also drew on the conversation as more relevant in her enrollment, if only to adhere to the placement recommendation. They explained quite different meetings with clearly different results that led to the second material consequence: curriculum. Despite curricular alignment between the mainstream and

EAL courses, Hemani and Kavya distinctly identified differences in the course activities, projects, and goals. Although Kavya's EAL courses were designed to support linguistic development, Kavya did not report growth in English language knowledge, rendering the intended material consequence of language learning not obviously realized. Meanwhile, Hemani felt well-supported in her mainstream writing classes and prepared to transfer her knowledge. In their cases, the placement advising and curriculum emerged as the materials whose consequences were the divergence in their experiences.

Theoretical: Considering the theoretical consequences enables conjecture of the long-term impacts of the social and material consequences and necessitates consideration of local context. At UArizona, the Writing Program is widely perceived to prepare students for disciplinary writing. The first theoretical consequence of Hemani and Kavya taking different courses is that they received different instruction that will affect their future writing. For Kavya, as she did not acknowledge the linguistic preparation she supposedly received in the EAL courses, it remains unknown as to whether she will feel linguistically prepared in future writing contexts. Perhaps she implicitly developed her language through the EAL-centric instruction that Hemani did not receive in her mainstream courses, but this is unclear. A second theoretical consequence is that, as international students, it could be helpful that Kavya's transcript reports that she took EAL versions of Foundation Writing, assuaging potential fears of underdeveloped language. Conversely, by Hemani taking the mainstream course, she might be less marked for potential language deficiency and benefit that way. These outward-facing preparations and identities are likely to be experienced inwardly, as well. To what extent will Kavya continue to feel like an outsider international student? Will Hemani, despite positively engaging with her multilingual, international identity in the Writing Program, have similar encounters in other contexts or will she be targeted for her differences? Theoretical thinking also allows extension of Hemani and Kavya's stories to other international and multilingual students on campus. How does involvement in certain discourse communities dis/empower students from participating in other university programs? How does the way the Writing Program (one of the only academic units to see nearly every single undergraduate) treats placement and pedagogy of international and multilingual students impact other university programs' perception of and engagement with this population? Each theoretical consequence remains speculative but implores WPAs to consider the reverberations, both positive and negative, that students will feel within the Writing Program and beyond because of the courses into which they are placed and enrolled, as well as WPAs' influence on those processes and impacts.

Operationalizing Schendel and O'Neill's (1999) request as this heuristic creates an analytical tool that is well-suited to be taken up across contexts to organize the threads of many student narratives. This heuristic locates moments where the theorized pros, like improved student experience, and cons, such as lacking knowledge of which course will best suit them, of DSP for international students come to life. This new knowledge points to revision opportunities for enhancing validity and reliability, which, in this case, includes greater communication about course options and increased visibility of Placement Advisors.

Hemani and Kavya's stories unlock past, present, and future reflections on the literacy development spurred by DSP. They provide conflicting answers as to whether students actualize

agency in DSP or not. They demonstrate that placement is a critical piece in one's literacy journey, but only a first step on a long path of identity development for multilingual, international student writers. Looking at the course experiences shows that each course had different affordances and constraints, so it is not about developing the perfect course, but helping students choose which one will be the most beneficial to them. These results reorient the focus from solely considering the moment of placement or conceiving of it as an isolated activity to instead holistically situating it within a student's literacy education.

As we consider what these results mean for moving forward, reexamining the DSP tool itself is an obvious next step. Subsequently, since the 2019 iteration that Hemani and Kavya interacted with, the placement process, including the questionnaire tool, has been revised.[3] This was due largely in response to needing more equitable placement practices. For example, international students are now allowed to take the honors-level course (ENGL 109H). Also, domestic students are made more aware of their ability to take ENGL 107 and 108, which is particularly useful to our multilingual Hispanic and Indigenous students. Moreover, changes in student demographics and course modalities because of the pandemic required updating the questionnaire's content, such as revised questions about learning preferences. Erin Whittig, Assistant Director of Placement and Assessment, spoke about UArizona's changes in 2020 on the panel, "Placement in the Pandemic: What to Consider When You're Considering Directed Self-Placement," which is available as a recording on the Conference on College Composition and Communication's website (Conlon et al., 2020). Hemani and Kavya's stories showed a lot of the inconsistencies that needed these kinds of revisions. Kavya's story in particular showcases that using a DSP process does not inherently create liberatory placement. The differing questionnaire and course options show how students' linguistic and cultural identities were still separated into the mainstream versus EAL binary. Weighting visa status over the learning situations that would best suit students demonstrates how, even though students could self-place, domestic and international students alike were still funneled towards specific classes. The revisions in the most recent years of our institution's DSP seek out the best balance of *directed* and *self* in the placement process. As we continue researching DSP, both at this institution and elsewhere, research should look for these kinds of disparities between the theoretical goals of DSP and the implementation of tools and practices.

Placement should thus be examined within a feedback loop. There are several steps to developing a user-informed DSP tool. First, look at the students in the program and the resources that are available. Brainstorm and identify extant issues and needs. Consider funds and support systems that can become potential solutions. Inoue (2009) urges thinking through the institution's social and racial landscape and ways to build community through assessment and placement. Second, develop those responses. Bedore and Rossen-Knill (2004) encourage creating resources with thorough explanations of the courses available to avoid misinformation and miscommunication. Kenner (2016) recommends developing a tool that guides students through self-reflection on their confidence and past experiences. Wang (2020) articulates the need for involving WPAs who understand courses and advisors who understand students' careers to support students' decision making. Third, try it out. Fourth, invite participants to share their experiences. Student interview research is a predominant practice in DSP research. A fuller knowledge of the process can be gained through WPAs' reflexivity (e.g., Caouette, 2019) and quantitative assessment of

3 Placement materials are property of UArizona and are not included here. Please visit the Writing Program's website for the most current information.

students' responses (e.g., Aull, 2021). The final step, analysis of the social, material, and theoretical consequences identified within the data, is the re-starting point as step one's needs discovery process. This feedback loop allows the chance to consistently blend WPA's expertise and students' experience to curate data-driven revisions.

Conclusion

This research asks more questions than it provides answers. The likelihood of finding another set of quadrilingual, bicultural international student sister participants like Hemani and Kavya is exceptionally slim, but I do not think that the chances of their experiences with placement and writing courses happening to other students are just as rare. I argue that every student's story is just as unique as theirs, as each student arrives with their own story. In a 6,000-student writing program that gets a new crop of students each year, that is a lot of positionalities. It is indeed impossible to capture them all and create a DSP tool that will consider each one. Nevertheless, seeking out thick description (Lillis, 2008) of such a densely populated writing program is a useful move that can work in tandem with existing assessment measures. We can see whether processes like DSP that are designed to be liberatory actually fulfill that purpose or instead act to homogenize multilingual, international students and other marginalized groups. It is important to ask these questions at any kind of institution, no matter how big or how small. Just as we contextualize our placement process, so, too, should we tailor our research of it. Case studies of placement that allow opportunities for deep listening, particularly to students with marginalized identities, emerges as a way to connect with the intentions of DSP that forefront students' needs. It becomes a reflective opportunity that is agentive in and of itself for students to consider their experiences and direct WPAs to areas for improvement. Inviting students to contribute to the knowledge-making of a writing program paves the way for inclusion, amplifying individual voices that would otherwise be drowned out and affirming students' experiential wisdom.

Hemani and Kavya's stories support the literature that placing multilingual and international students can be difficult. Their narratives confront the questions of self-efficacy, institutional knowledge, and power in a self-placement process. They remind us that multilingual and international student writers are complex, with unique goals for writing development, and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Because of this, we can affirm DSP as a helpful tool for providing agency-building opportunities. DSP's potential to enable multilingual and international students for success is why we must continue to research and iterate it. My conversations with Hemani and Kavya open many lines of inquiry, which is the consequence of human-centered work. Hemani and Kavya's stories should encourage us to ask other students about their literacy experiences so as to deepen and widen our knowledge of our program's ethos and work to enhance the placement and course experiences for multilingual, international students still to come.

Acknowledgments

Analeigh would like to thank Aimee Mapes for her steadfast guidance through this project, Erin Whittig and Kathleen Kryger in the Office of Placement & Assessment for their insight to the placement process, and Sara Vickery in the Writing Program for her administrative assistance. Analeigh thanks the English Department and Writing Program at UArizona for supporting this project through the Tilly Warnock Writing Program Fellowship Award (2020). Analeigh is

also grateful to the reviewers and *JWA* team as well as the 2021 CWPA Awards Committee who provided invaluable feedback upon awarding her the 2021 CWPA Graduate Research Award for Writing in WPA Studies for an earlier version of this article.

Author Bio

Analeigh E. Horton (she/her) is a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Arizona in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English with a minor in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching. Analeigh is a 2022-2023 Bilinsky Educational Foundation Doctoral Research Fellow. She is the Graduate Specialist for Assessment & Instructional Support for the Office of General Education and the former Graduate Assistant Director of the Writing Program. Analeigh, a Fulbright alumna, has taught in five countries and published in seven journals and three books.

References

Antón, M. (2012). Dynamic assessment. In G. Fulcher & F. Davidson (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of language testing* (pp. 106–119). Routledge.

Aull, L. (2021). Directed self-placement: Subconstructs and group differences at a U.S. university. *Assessing Writing*, 48, 100522. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2021.100522

Bedore, P., & Rossen-Knill, D. F. (2004). Informed self-placement: Is a choice offered a choice received? *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 28(1–2), 55–78.

Benda, J., Dedek, M., Gallagher, C., Girdharry, K., Lerner, N., & Noonan, M. (2018). Confronting superdiversity in US writing programs. In S. K. Rose & I. Weiser (Eds.), T*he Internationalization of US Writing Programs* (pp. 79–96). Utah State University Press.

Brandt, D. (1998). Sponsors of literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 49(2), 165–185. https://doi.org/10.2307/358929

Canagarajah, S. (2011). Codemeshing in academic writing: Identifying teachable Strategies of translanguaging. *The Modern Language Journal*, 95(3), 401–417.

Caouette, B. L. (2019). Directed self-placement, corequisite models, and curricular choice. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 38(1), 56–77. https://doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2019.38.1.04

CCCC. (2020). *CCCC statement on second language writing and multilingual writers*. https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting

Condon, W., Glade, F., Haswell, R. H., Johnson-Shull, L., Kelly-Riley, D., Leonhardy, G., Nelson, J., McLeod, S., & Wyche, S. (2001). Whither? Some questions, some answers. In R. H. Haswell (Ed.), *Beyond outcomes: Assessment and instruction within a university writing program* (pp. 191–205). Ablex.

Conlon, K., Dean, A., Gevers, J., & Whittig, E. (2020, May 18). Placement in the pandemic: What to consider when you're considering directed self-placement. *Conference on College Composition & Communication*. https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/placement-in-the-pandemic-webinar

Crusan, D. (2006). The politics of implementing online directed self-placement for second language writers. In P. K. Matsuda, C. Ortmeier-Hooper, & X. You (Eds.), *The politics of second language writing: In search of the promised land* (pp. 205–221). Parlor Press.

Crusan, D. (2011). The promise of directed self-placement for second language writers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(4), 774–780. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2010.272524

Crusan, D., & Ruecker, T. (2019). Standardized testing pressures and the temptation of the five-paragraph essay. In N. A. Caplan & A. M. Johns (Eds.), *Changing practices for the L2 writing classroom* (pp. 201–220). University of Michigan Press.

DasBender, G. (2011). Assessing Generation 1.5 learners: The revelations of directed self-placement. In N. Elliot & L. Perelman (Eds.), *Writing assessment in the 21st century: Essays in honor of Edward M. White* (pp. 371–384). Hampton Press.

Donahue, C. (2009). 'Internationalization' and composition studies: Reorienting the discourse. *College Composition and Communication*, 61(2), 212–243.

English. (n.d.). About the Foundations Writing Program. The University of Arizona. Retrieved October 1, 2020, from https://english.arizona.edu/foundations-writing/about

Ferris, D., & Hedgcock, J. (2014). *Teaching L2 composition* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Ferris, D., & Lombardi, A. (2020). Collaborative placement of multilingual writers: Combining formal assessment and self-evaluation. *The Journal of Writing Assessment*, 13(1). http://journalofwritingassessment.org/article.php?article=149

Ferris, D. R., Evans, K., & Kurzer, K. (2017). Placement of multilingual writers: Is there a role for student voices? *Assessing Writing*, 32, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2016.10.001

Fishman, J., Lunsford, A., McGregor, B., & Otuteye, M. (2005). Performing writing, performing literacy. *College Composition and Communication*, 57(2), 224–252.

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149–171. https://doi.org/10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149

Gere, A. R., Aull, L., Escudero, M., Lancaster, Z., & Vander Lei, E. (2013). Local assessment: Using genre analysis to validate directed self-placement. *College Composition and Communication*, 64(4), 605–633.

Gere, A. R., Aull, L., Green, T., & Porter, A. (2010). Assessing the validity of directed self-placement at a large university. *Assessing Writing*, 15(3), 154–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2010.08.003

Hackman, J. D., & Johnson, P. (1981). Understanding standardized test scores for placement in college English courses: A new look at an old problem. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 15, 275–279.

Horner, B. (2001). 'Students' Right,' English only, and re-imagining the politics of language. *College English*, 63(6), 741–758. https://doi.org/10.2307/1350100

Huot, B. (2002). *(Re)articulating writing assessment for teaching and learning*. Utah State University Press.

Inoue, A. B. (2009). Self-assessment as programmatic center: The first year writing program and its assessment at California State University, Fresno. *Composition Forum*, 20. http://compositionforum.com/issue/20/calstate-fresno.php

Inoue, A. B., Fernandez, M., Gary, L., Gomes, M., Harriger, D., Johnson, K., Maddox, S., Nakamura, B., Richmond, T., Sinha, A., & Speechly, D. (2011). Directed self-placement

(WPA-CompPile research bibliographies, No. 16). *WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies*, 1–17. http://comppile.org/wpa/bibliographies/Bib16/DSP.pdf

Jarratt, S. C., Mack, K., Sartor, A., & Watson, S. E. (2009). Pedagogical memory: Writing, mapping, translating. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 33(1–2), 46–73.

Kenner, K. (2016). Student rationale for self-placement into first-year composition: Decision making and directed self-placement. *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 43(3), 274–289.

Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: How difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(6), 1121–1134.

Leblanc, R., & Painchaud, G. (1985). Self-assessment as a second language placement instrument. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(4), 673–687.

Lillis, T. (2008). Ethnography as method, methodology, and "deep theorizing": Closing the gap between text and context in academic writing research. *Written Communication*, 25(3), 353–388. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741088308319229

Matsuda, P. K. (2006). The myth of linguistic homogeneity in U.S. college composition. *College English*, 68(6), 637–651. https://doi.org/10.2307/25472180

Matsuda, P. K., & Silva, T. (1999). Cross-cultural composition: Mediated integration of US and international students. *Composition Studies*, 27(1), 15–30.

Moos, A., & Van Zanen, K. (2019). Directed self-placement as a tool to foreground student agency. *Assessing Writing*, 41, 68–71. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2019.06.001

Ramdas, L. (2001). Women and literacy: A quest for justice. In E. Cushman, E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll, & M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy: A critical sourcebook* (pp. 629–643). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Royer, D. J., & Gilles, R. (1998). Directed self-placement: An attitude of orientation. *College Composition and Communication*, 50(1), 54–70. https://doi.org/10.2307/358352

Royer, D. J., & Gilles, R. (2003). The pragmatist foundation of directed self-placement. In D. J. Royer & R. Gilles (Eds.), *Directed self-placement: Principles and practices* (pp. 49–70). Hampton Press.

Rubin, D. L., & Williams-James, M. (1997). The impact of writer nationality on mainstream teachers' judgments of composition quality. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 6(2), 139–154. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(97)90031-X

Ruecker, T. (2011). Improving the placement of L2 writers: The students' perspective. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 35(1), 91–117.

Ruiz, I. D. (2016). *Reclaiming composition for Chicano/as and other ethnic minorities: A critical history and pedagogy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Saenkhum, T. (2016). *Decisions, agency, and advising: Key issues in the placement of multilingual writers into first-year composition courses*. Utah State University Press.

Saidy, C. (2018). Inez in transition: Using case study to explore the experiences of underrepresented students in first-year composition. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 41(2), 17–34.

Schendel, E., & O'Neill, P. (1999). Exploring the theories and consequences of self-assessment through ethical inquiry. *Assessing Writing*, 6(2), 199–227.

Tardy, C. M. (2011). Enacting and transforming local language policies. *College Composition and Communication*, 62(4), 634–661.

Toth, C. (2019). Directed self-placement at two-year colleges: A kairotic moment. *The Journal of Writing Assessment*, 12(1). http://journalofwritingassessment.org/article.php?article=134

Toth, C., & Aull, L. (2014). Directed self-placement questionnaire design: Practices, problems, possibilities. *Assessing Writing*, 20, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2013.11.006

University Analytics & Institutional Research. (2020). Enrollment. The University of Arizona. Retrieved November 1, 2020, from https://uair.arizona.edu/content/enrollment

Wang, Z. (2020). Toward a rhetorical model of directed self-placement. *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 44(1), 45–67.