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SCAFFOLDING LITERACY AT A BRANCH CAMPUS OF AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

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INTERNATIONAL BRANCH CAMPUSES AND STUDENTS' WRITING NEEDS

Reforming and modernizing higher education has recently become an important goal in the national vision of several Middle Eastern countries. To move toward this goal, a common strategy has been the emulation of models from abroad—mostly Western models—by establishing international branch campuses (IBCs) on their soil. Of the 240 IBCs established worldwide, approximately one-third of these are located in the MENA region (C-BERT 2017; Miller-Idriss and Hanauer 2011, 182). Most of these adopt English as the language of instruction.

With this expansion of IBCs in non-English-speaking contexts comes the significant challenge of adapting to the institutional structures, expectations, and needs of the host country (Wilkins and Huisman 2012, 5) while maintaining the institution's education quality (Miller and Pessoa 2017, 188). The difficulty of maintaining the standards of the home institution becomes salient when it comes to academic writing in English, particularly in academic writing in the disciplines. Research in this area shows that students may find themselves struggling to complete their studies in a second language (Coleman 2006, 7; Hughes 2008,

118), and technical and academic writing can be especially challenging for students at IBCs (Evans and Morrison 2011, 203). In our context, we found that many students enter the university less prepared and with less knowledge of academic genres than students at the main campus (Miller and Pessoa 2017, 182). The challenge is exacerbated because professors coming from the main campus of these universities may not have extensive experience teaching linguistically and culturally diverse students and may, therefore, not be prepared to help their students with their writing needs.

Our previous research shows that faculty adopt different strategies when faced with this challenge when adjusting to IBCs (Miller and Pessoa 2017, 186). Concerned about maintaining the main campus standard by covering all the material and not watering down the curriculum, some professors do not adjust their practices or course expectations at all. Others lessen the intensity of writing and reading requirements for their courses. Still others invest significant effort in helping students develop their writing skills either by developing strategies to scaffold student writing through past experience or by seeking opportunities to collaborate with writing faculty to more effectively scaffold their students' writing.

In this chapter, we[1] focus on our interdisciplinary collaborations with faculty in history, design, and information systems at a branch campus of an American university in the Middle East. We describe the underlying process of collaboration that guided our work and the implementation of writing workshops. We then provide a summary of the collaboration in each discipline and present some evidence of the outcomes. The central purpose of this chapter is to show how these interdisciplinary collaborations serve as a model to scaffold student writing development in higher education, particularly in IBCs.

A MODEL FOR SCAFFOLDING STUDENT WRITING DEVELOPMENT

Our approach to scaffolding student writing development follows the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)-informed genre pedagogy. SFL research provides rich descriptions of various genres, including the stages and linguistic features that are important for meet-

ing the expectations of school genres (Christie and Derewianka 2008, 1; Coffin 2006, 18; de Oliveira 2011, 25; Schleppegrell 2004, 113). Operating from the perspective that genre is a "staged, goal-oriented, social process" (Martin 1992, 505), SFL-based genre instruction aims to scaffold students' production of increasingly complex genres by making language choices explicit (Martin, 2001, 155; Martin and Rose 2008, 6). As much previous research has found SFL-informed genre pedagogy to be effective for improving academic writing, we have used these tools in our collaborations with faculty in history, design, and information systems to scaffold student writing development.

Our collaborative process requires us to gain knowledge about disciplinary, course, and assignment expectations. We begin by reviewing course materials and assignment guidelines and interviewing the faculty. We use this information to understand how each course's expectations align with what we have learned from our review of the literature on writing in the discipline under study. Taken together, this knowledge then informs our analysis of high-graded and low-graded assignments from former students to identify the features of valued responses to the assignments. We also engage the faculty in think-aloud protocols with student writing to gain more insights about how our analysis of what they seem to value aligns with their reaction to the text as they read. This information allows us to redesign assignment guidelines to make expectations more explicit for students. We then develop and deliver workshop materials that make explicit the language needed to meet genre expectations (Pessoa, Mitchell, and Reilly, forthcoming). To document outcomes, we collect and analyze student writing using SFL. We use interviews with students and faculty throughout the semester to help contextualize our analysis and document feedback about the workshops. Based on what we learn from the entire process across a semester, we then refine our existing materials and consider new ways to improve this iterative process for subsequent semesters.

Clearly, this model of interdisciplinary collaboration to scaffold student writing development requires considerable investment from both language specialists and disciplinary faculty in an on-going process of data collection and analysis to implement improved versions of the intervention. Our research shows that such investment has positive effects on student writing development. In the following section, we re-

port on our work in history, design, and information systems and highlight some outcomes of these collaborations.

SCAFFOLDING WRITING IN HISTORY

Since 2009, we have been collecting and analyzing student writing from a global histories course at our institution. In this course, students are expected to write six argumentative essays (1–2 pages each) in response to prompts and based on primary and secondary sources. However, our research shows that students do not always meet assignment and genre expectations (Miller, Mitchell, and Pessoa 2016, 17; Miller and Pessoa 2016a, 853; Mitchell and Pessoa 2017, 31; Pessoa, Mitchell, and Miller 2017, 48). Thus, following our model of interdisciplinary collaboration described earlier, we have developed a series of writing workshops to help students better meet the expectations of the history argument genre (Pessoa, Mitchell, and Reilly, forthcoming). As our understanding of writing expectations in this course evolved, we created a new assessment rubric for the essays. This rubric stays faithful to the professor's desired criteria while also making the linguistic resources needed to meet these criteria explicit. The rubric's descriptions and the workshop materials mutually reinforce each other: we supplement the rubric with annotated copies of sample texts that illustrate strong and weak use of the resources for each category. By linking student assessment more directly to linguistic resources they need to write effectively, we hope that our explication of these resources will have an even stronger impact.

Each of the workshops largely follow the same structure. We ask the students to prepare before the workshops at home by reviewing sample texts with guided questions. During the workshops, we discuss their answers as we introduce relevant metalanguage. We then provide new samples to analyze together, using the metalanguage to identify strengths and co-constructing revisions when the samples can be improved.

More specifically, Workshop 1 focuses on the disciplinary expectations of responding to the prompt with an arguable thesis, following the stages of argument, and staying consistent from beginning to end. We provide students with sample prompts and thesis statements to high-

light the difference between argumentative and non-argumentative thesis statements. We make it explicit to the students that to write an argumentative thesis statement, they need to make a claim about the source text with an interpretation, characterization, or evaluation, rather than just reproduce information from the source. We also show how to avoid the common pitfall of responding with non-arguments by showing samples that ignore key language in the prompts, such as language that invites a thesis with an evaluation of degree, a key type of prompt for history argument writing (Coffin 2006, 78). We go through the stages of argumentation by illustrating an effectively organized sample essay with the stages clearly color coded. The stages of history arguments include: 1) an optional background section, 2) a thesis stage where a central argument is set forth, 3) supporting arguments with effective topic sentences, and 4) finally, a reinforcement of the central argument (Coffin 2006, 79). We also use samples to highlight the importance of staying consistent from beginning to end, as we have found that former students wrote inconsistent arguments, particularly when the thesis and reinforcement stages did not align (Miller, Mitchell, and Pessoa 2014, 111).

Workshop 2 focuses on the disciplinary expectation of using evidence that is carefully interpreted and assessed to defend a position while incorporating diverse points of view (de Oliveira 2011, 112). Thus, we emphasize the importance of bringing different voices into the argument, attending to the tentative nature of historical evidence, and maintaining an argumentative stance throughout the essay. We focus on interpersonal resources based on Martin and White's (2005, 92) engagement framework to help students integrate information from the sources, show awareness of multiple perspectives, and align the reader with their position. We discuss incorporation of the source text in terms of *expanding the dialog* by acknowledging the sources (e.g., "According to McNeill") and incorporating information from the source (e.g., by quoting), and then *narrowing the dialog* by explaining the quotations as they relate to the writer's argument (e.g., *this evidence indicates that*) and thus bringing the reader closer to the writer's perspective. These resources allow students to analyze their evidence, formulate *reasons* to explain *why* they chose certain quotes for evidence, and assert how the evidence supports their claims. We also discuss the use of counter (*but; just; only*) and concede-counter (*although this . . .*

that) moves that allow writers to demonstrate an awareness of different perspectives while aligning the reader with their established position.

Our analysis of student writing from a semester when we conducted these workshops indicates that our explicit instruction has helped students increasingly meet genre expectations and integrate the target linguistic features of the workshops in their writing (Pessoa, Mitchell, and Reilly, forthcoming). The students who benefited most from the workshops were those who began the semester with least success (in their first essay, prior to Workshop 1) in terms of meeting genre expectations and using valued linguistic resources effectively (Mitchell and Pessoa 2017, 35; Pessoa, Mitchell, and Miller, 2018, 88). Our findings also indicate that more experienced student writers incorporated workshop materials in more sophisticated ways than the novice writers (Pessoa, Mitchell, and Miller, 2018, 89). These outcomes provide positive reassurance of the value of our on-going interdisciplinary collaboration, which evolves as we continue to collect and analyze student writing.

SCAFFOLDING WRITING IN DESIGN

In 2015 and 2016, we collaborated with a design professor to scaffold writing in his reading-intensive and discussion-driven course that introduces students to design history, theory, and criticism, entitled "The Designed World: A Liberal Inquiry into Design and Human Experience." The course comprises four units: communication (visual design), construction (industrial design), interaction (design for experience), and integration (using design principles from the first three units to address complex systems/problems). Students are required to write four argumentative papers (ranging from 1,000 to 2,400 words) in which they apply one or more theoretical frameworks from the course to critique the design of real-world objects, spaces, experiences, or systems.

Following our model for scaffolding student writing, in the first part of the collaboration, we tried to understand what the design professor valued in student writing by analyzing papers written by his former students. Our analysis indicated that the higher-graded essays were more analytical than the low-graded essays; higher-graded writing more frequently and effectively applied design theories, cited course readings, and integrated key concepts from design as analytical frameworks

(Mitchell and Pessoa, forthcoming). We then interviewed the professor and asked him to perform think-aloud protocols with the student papers. All of this helped us unpack his expectations for writing beyond what was explicit in his original assignment descriptions. In our first interview with the professor, we learned that our initial findings were closely aligned with his expectations for strong writing. In this first phase we also began to initiate revisions to the assignment guidelines and assessment rubric with the professor.

The second phase involved the collaborative rewriting of the assignment guidelines. This was a thorough process of two-hour meetings to unpack the professor's expectations for each of the four assignments (eight hours total). In each meeting, we posed questions to the professor about the most current assignment guidelines to ensure we understood his goals and expectations. When we pressed him for more details, the professor often seemed confused about what he was asking of students, and we all clarified our understanding significantly after much probing and questioning. We (the authors) used what we learned to draft more explicit guidelines about the central argument, required analytical frameworks, and potential organization.

In the third phase, we developed workshop materials to scaffold each of the four writing assignments. In these workshops, we co-taught with the professor to explain the assignment guidelines to the students and led brainstorming activities to generate strategies for executing the assignments' structure, functional moves, and connections to course material. The scaffolding materials listed the purpose of the assignment in general terms (e.g., apply design frameworks to an analysis of visual communication), followed by a specific description of the assignment. In the workshops, we read the assignment with the students and then asked them to articulate what they understood to be expected of them. We provided them with an example of the general argument they were to make in the given paper. We then brainstormed the potential parts of the paper: the introduction, an explication of the key concepts, and the analysis of objects/experiences/spaces, and a conclusion. To ensure that students would front their argument, we asked them to brainstorm ideas for what to include in the introduction. We generated strategies for paragraph development, including creating a strong controlling idea, balancing description of design objects with critical claims about them, and integrating source material purposefully.

At the end of each semester, we conducted a follow-up interview with the professor to reflect upon the collaboration and its outcomes and short interviews with the students, and we analyzed student writing after the collaboration. Our post-collaboration analysis shows improvement in student writing compared to former student writing. Our analysis of Paper 1 written in fall 2014 (without writing workshops) with Paper 1 from fall 2015 shows that the papers written in fall 2015 are more analytical. They have more citations, rely less on narrative language, consistently frame the introduction using the problem-solution structure discussed in the workshops, effectively introduce the source material to set up the argument, have a focused and explicit main claim, use a unifying concept for analysis, frame the analysis using design theory, effectively integrate the course authors in the analysis, and highlight both positive and negative features of communication design. Our preliminary analyses of subsequent assignments are similar and seem to confirm the positive impact of our explicit instruction.

SCAFFOLDING WRITING IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Our work scaffolding student writing in history and design has led to a major research project in which we work with the faculty in the entire information systems program at our institution to scaffold student writing development. An initial component of this project has been our collaboration with one professor to scaffold the writing of a case analysis assignment in his introductory information systems course.

The case analysis is a prominent genre in information systems and business education that is based on the Harvard case method and requires students to study a case and write an analysis of it. The case is a document, or set of documents, that describes a company, its background, and/or its employees; highlights problems encountered by the company or its product; and, sometimes, discusses the company's approaches to solving the problems. Cases are often factual reports on actual businesses, but some are fictional; however, they always present an objective account of a realistic business situation. Although the features of case analyses may vary, they are usually written as a problem-solution genre in which students identify an organization's problem(s) and implemented solutions, analyze how successful the organization

was in solving its problem(s), and propose further solutions and/or rec-ommendations (Forman and Rymer, 1999, 124; Nathan, 2013, 62; 2016, 5; Zhu, 2004, 120). In the analysis stage, students are often expected to draw on key concepts from the curriculum and connect the case to these concepts in their analysis.

Our previous work analyzing case analyses from former students in this institution shows that students were often overwhelmed by the many roles and functions they had to enact (Miller and Pessoa 2016b, 47). A role can be thought of as a textual identity that the writer adopts through their writing in a text, with different parts of the case analysis calling upon students to enact the roles of student, consultant, or man-ager. At the same time, each role has various functions; for example, enacting the student role may involve reporting on the case, synthesiz-ing information from it, or applying disciplinary knowledge to the case; enacting the role of the consultant involves providing recommendations based on evaluations. Given these diverse roles and functions, many students did not meet genre expectations because they never shifted from reporting to analyzing (Miller and Pessoa 2016b, 52). We realized the assignment guidelines, which simply posed questions for students to answer about the case, likely contributed to the students' difficulties. Students did not understand that these questions were aiming to elicit a full-fledged problem-solution-analysis genre, and, thus, most re-sponded with discrete answers to each question. In order to effectively scaffold student writing of the case analysis genre, we determined that the assignment guidelines needed to be explicit about the purpose of a case analysis, the stages, and the linguistic features to accomplish each stage, particularly the analysis stage.

We worked with the professor on multiple revisions of the assign-ment, eventually composing a version that included a definition of case analysis and explicitly articulated the expectations for their written product. Students were told that the purpose of the case analysis was to analyze the strategies that a company implemented to overcome its decline in sales and provide evaluative claims with support about the extent of its success. In order to do this, students first had to explain the case in their own words (i.e., summarize and synthesize the problem(s) the company faced and the solution(s) it implemented), and then ana-lyze and evaluate the case. In their analysis, the students were to rely on theoretical frameworks or key concepts learned in class. For this case

analysis, they were to refer to different approaches to innovation (e.g., incremental vs. radical innovation, process vs. product innovation).

We then developed scaffolding materials for a workshop. The scaffolding materials described the structure of the assignment in more detail with a focus on the analysis section. In the writing workshop, we emphasized the difference between reporting on the case and analyzing it. We told students that while reporting and synthesizing are important in order to identify the problem(s) and solution(s) implemented by the company, an effective case analysis goes beyond reporting and uses the key concepts from the course (e.g., approaches to innovation) to analyze how successful the company was in implementing its solution(s). In the workshop, we presented students with model paragraphs that highlighted ways to keep the case analysis analytical. We presented students with a sample introduction that stated the purpose of the case analysis, what key words were used to analyze the case, and what the students' main argument about the case analysis was with a phrase such as: "My analysis shows that the LEGO company (the case) was successful/not successful/somewhat successful in implementing X type of innovation(s)." We also provided a sample paragraph to show a strategy for starting the analytical stage by restating the main claim, introducing and defining key concepts of analysis, and stating potential supporting claims. We showed them a sample analytical paragraph that highlighted effective use of particular linguistic resources that allow writers to make a point/claim at the beginning of their paragraph and support their claim with evidence from the case and connections to the key concepts of analysis. We highlighted the importance of nuanced and balanced evaluations within an analytical paragraph.

Based on the assignment guidelines and workshop materials, we co-designed a rubric with the professor. The postdoctoral research fellow on our team used this rubric to assess students' rough drafts and give them feedback, with a specific focus on the stages of the case analysis and the use of analytical language. Based on this feedback, the students wrote a final draft that was graded and commented on by the information systems professor.

Our analysis of the students' final draft of the case analysis reveals improvement in student writing compared to a previous semester. Although there are differences between higher-graded and lower-graded case analyses, the redesign of the assignment guidelines and the explicit

instruction in the workshops allowed all students to follow the stages of a case analysis. In previous years, students answered questions posed by the professor about the case without any attention to genre stages. By being clear about the distinct reporting and analysis stages of the case analysis, we found a reduction in the problems caused by the diverse roles and purposes in previous semesters; most students were able to clearly report on the case, untangling problems and solutions and presenting them effectively in discrete sections. In addition, we found more evidence of analytical writing, as students grounded evaluations about the case in relevant key concepts from the course. Building on our work in this course, we are working to refine these scaffolding materials and implement them in a second-semester information systems course in which the same students are expected to write more sophisticated case analyses. We will continue to track students' uptake of the writing workshop materials and their writing development as they progress through their studies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter highlights the value of collaboration between language specialists and faculty in the disciplines and provides a model of collaboration that can be useful in meeting the needs of the increasing number of linguistically and culturally diverse students in higher education, particularly those studying in international branch campuses of Western universities. Our findings show how our process helps faculty clarify their expectations and provide more explicit assignment guidelines, both of which lead to positive writing outcomes. By helping faculty increase awareness of their expectations and the linguistic demands of their assignments, they are then better able to scaffold student writing without the support of writing specialists. This model of collaboration is particularly important at IBCs because although most students at IBCs are second language writers, many of the disciplinary instructors may not have training in writing pedagogy to help second language writers adhere to the rhetorical conventions that are accepted within their particular discourse community.

While this chapter offers several snapshots of our particular interdisciplinary collaborations, SFL-informed genre pedagogy can be imple-

mented in many ways. In fact, our model of collaboration is based on a larger-scale project at the City University of Hong Kong called the SLATE (Scaffolding Literacy in Academic and Tertiary Environments) project (Dreyfus et al. 2016, 1). In this project, researchers from the University of Sydney worked with faculty in Hong Kong in disciplines such as biology and linguistics to understand assignment expectations. Based on what they learned, they were then able to help scaffold the writing of students in Hong Kong remotely (online). There are even institutions where such collaborations are part of the curriculum. Vantage College (VC) at University of British Columbia (UBC) offers international students an eleven-month-curriculum of core content courses in one of four programs (Arts, Sciences, Engineering, and Management) taught by faculty in these disciplines, which is combined with substantial discipline-specific language training in concurrent language-focused modules or for-credit courses provided by the Academic English Program. When VC students successfully complete this eleven-month curriculum, they join the rest of the UBC students in second-year courses. Given its scale, our model of collaboration falls in between the SLATE project and VC, in that it targets specific disciplines that have shown an interest in working with us and it is spearheaded by only the first two authors with support on data analysis from the third author, and with support from research staff when funding is available.

Our model of interdisciplinary collaboration requires considerable effort and investment beyond our typical responsibilities by both language specialists and disciplinary faculty. The starting point for such collaborations is having a disciplinary faculty member interested in addressing student needs through a focus on language. Then, the language specialists must become familiar with the particular demands and challenges of the professor's writing assignments, and of the discipline's linguistic and genre demands. This data and background knowledge form the basis for the development of the intervention materials. After implementing an intervention, it is important to sustain an iterative process of data collection, analysis, and reimplementation to continue refining the materials.

This process closely aligns with the goals of design-based research (Anderson and Shattuck 2012, 16; Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc 2004, 18), which is an iterative process and a formative research method that involves collaborations between researchers and practitioners. This

method focuses on both the design and implementation of an intervention to examine its impact on learning and teaching in a real-world setting. Since context is important in design-based research, contextual factors determine the kinds of collaborations that can take place in different settings.

In our context, for example, there are several notable factors that have shaped our collaborations. We are at an advantage because all departments in our institution are housed in the same building. Thus, the physical space enhances the kinds of working relationships we can develop with disciplinary faculty. In addition, we have a light teaching load and opportunities for research funding that allow us to hire full-time research associates. We have also encountered individual differences among the faculty that influence the implementation and sustainability of these collaborations. While some faculty can be highly engaged and committed to working with us, we have also worked with less responsive faculty who see the value of the writing workshops we (the authors) offer to their students but are somewhat resistant to changing their own pedagogical practices. Thus, for these interdisciplinary collaborations to be effectively implemented, we recommend starting small and paying close attention to the contextual factors of the particular institution. Ultimately, our findings from writing outcomes in different disciplines suggest that this kind of collaboration can be successful in supporting student writing development in higher education, particularly in international contexts.

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NOTE

1. English faculty with training in linguistics.