AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCES

MENA Writing Studies Journal

Volume 1 Issue 1 | Spring 2025

On Our Own Terms | Inaugural Issue

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Yasmine Mehio is an architect, historian, and artist. She has a BARCH from the American University of Beirut, an MA in Islamic Art and Architecture from the Lebanese American University and is currently completing a PhD in Arab and Middle Eastern History at AUB. Her artistic work expresses her love for both Beirut and its architectural heritage as she tried to understand her city's history, identity, and idiosyncrasies through its architecture.

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Acknowledgements

MENA Writing Studies Journal could not have moved from idea to conception without the support, expertise, and confidence from Yasmine Hajjar of AUB Press. Her insight regarding institutional practices, point people, and networks continues to be invaluable.

MENA WRITING STUDIES JOURNAL: MISSION STATEMENT

MENA Writing Studies Journal is an open-access, refereed, English-medium journal publishing research about the teaching of writing, composition, and rhetoric in the Middle East and North Africa. The journal's goal is to share the experiences and voices of instructors and scholars whose work and research is relevant to the region while also reflecting the diversity and complexity of the region itself, as it traverses geographical, linguistic, and national borders. The journal provides a space for theoretical and pedagogical discussions among those teaching writing in the MENA, working with students from the MENA, or in some way associated with the MENA.

We focus on "writing studies" in the broad sense, as people across the region come to the work of writing and writing coursework from many different entry points and institutional backgrounds. Though the medium of the journal is English, we welcome research conducted in any language context. We know writing to be a socially constructed act, and the sharing of how we and our students come to the work of writing will reinforce the rich contexts of our writing programs and diverse processes of our students. *MENA Writing Studies Journal* also aims to build a network of regional faculty and organizations dedicated to writing studies pedagogies, acknowledging the complexities of diaspora and diversity, and transnational and translingual writing practices.

We are open to publishing a wide range of research fitting into "writing studies." Topics of interest include, but are not limited to, translingualism, transnationalism, literacy studies, technology mediation, writing center work, writing program administration, WAC/WID, assessment and placement, writing and the community, and processes and production.

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MENA WRITING STUDIES JOURNAL

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On Our Own Terms: Editors' Introduction

Halle M. Neiderman, Sarah Elcheikhali, Dorota Fleszar, Marwa Mehio, and Amy Zenger

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *MENA Writing Studies Journal*. When the editorial board sat together to brainstorm how a regional publication could speak to the experiences of faculty and administrators navigating composition across the Middle East and North Africa, our answers went in three directions. We want to provide the practices and theories of writing that we see in our local spaces, we want to explicate the infrastructures that lead to successes and others that should be warnings, and we want to build relationships across institutional and national borders that provide support and insight for our faculty and administrators. While the internationalization of writing studies has been building for decades (Donahue & Horner, 2022; Martins, 2015; Thaiss, et al, 2012), the basis of programmatic work and disciplinarity has been scantily documented for the region (Arnold, Nebel, & Ronesi, 2017). Much of the theory of the internationalization of composition in higher education calls for linguistic mixing and the students' right to their own language (Donahue, 2009; Horner, 2018). While we are invested in amplifying how composing and programmatic theories can be productive for our students, particularly the translingual possibilities of our students, *MENA Writing Studies Journal* also wants to promote the ways programmatic infrastructures can and need to be adjusted for composition studies in MENA institutions and for locations and geographies we oscillate between and collaborate with.

We landed upon the theme of "On Our Own Terms" to acknowledge the practical and theoretical methods developed and utilized by regional writing programs, despite the lack of centralized scholarship. Often our work is included in a larger disciplinary context (Diab, 2006; Donahue & Horner, 2023; Esseili, 2014; Mehio, 2023; Zenger, 2018), which means providing background information in ways that may not be fruitful to findings and replication across the region. Furthermore, because scholarship is across writing studies' multiple sites of publication, finding and compiling region-specific research becomes an issue of time and access. This volume (and those to follow) provides writing faculty, administrators, and program developers the opportunity to cultivate space highlighting our laboring pedagogies, administrations, and innovations through the affordances and constraints that are familiar to the region. We see this first volume as building a community through the documentation of composing practices that reaches across universities and man-made boundaries to inform us on who exists, what tensions we navigate, and what successes we forge.

The joys within the challenges of teaching transnational composition are in the ways faculty can mesh cultures to bring about discovery and innovation within students. In "Embracing Multiple Perspectives: Dynamics of Harmony and Dissonance in English Classroom Discussions," Li and Watson explore their pedagogical journey of growing to understand first-year composition students' discussions as dialectical, multivocal harmonies reflective of collectivistic societies rather than the individualistic argumentative dissonances they were accustomed to hearing in Western classrooms. The authors combine Fairclough's framework for analyzing the discourse of student discussions with a blend of Western and Arabic musical lenses of sound and echo or syncopated instrumentals and improvised solos to describe the rhythm of discursive meaning-making in their Saudi Arabian classrooms.

For disciplines that are seemingly not writing intensive, faculty are often not aware of the amount of writing required across the discipline until the curriculum is reviewed. In "Measuring Writing Across the Curriculum in Nursing Education: The Role and Support of Learning to Write by Writing," authors Keaschuck, Bowman, and Tweedie discuss how the process of revising the nursing curriculum at their Qatar international branch campus disclosed new dimensions of the significance of writing in the nursing curriculum. The curriculum revision found that writing in the discipline and the field emerges in formal and informal processes. To encourage the maintenance of writing in the nursing curriculum, authors highlight the practice of Learning to Write by Writing (LWW) and recognize the role of writing centers in helping students connect writing with disciplinary practice and discovery. "Measuring Writing Across the Curriculum" illustrates where and how writing is expected within the nursing profession in the region, highlighting writing's significance beyond FYC.

Habre's "Starting and Sustaining Writing Centers in Lebanese Schools" details the process her university writing center followed to support the conception of high school writing centers throughout Lebanon. Her work reveals the ways in which differing institutions have differing understandings of writing, the extent to which English-speaking schools across the nation desired writing center implementation, and the means through which institutional constraints limited the participation and sustenance of writing centers. As Habre details the process of implementing writing centers and writing pedagogies, she explains how each high school had to navigate their institutional constraints to establish thriving writing support. Not only is Habre's work novel to her university and her context, her manuscript and initiative indicate the exigence for high school writing centers and for reciprocal alignment with the university.

A constant in transnational education is linguistic hierarchy. In "English as Capital vs. Language as Cultural: An Autoethnography of an Iranian Writer," Amiri provides us with a glimpse of how she navigates Iran, the United States, schooling, and her professional life as a person who is multilingual. In her autoethnography on language learning and identity negotiation, Amiri weaves a story of her linguistic development in Iran, exploring her acquisition of the English language alongside the assimilation of Western culture and ideas. Living in a context of national and cultural tension and change, she moves between resistance to the infiltration of these ideas and appreciation of how they can elucidate another culture. Amiri grapples with the hierarchies of languages and what she has gained and lost of her Persian as a result of learning English in Iran and learning English from an early age. Amiri's work is an important part of our collection because she calls for a flattening of all languages' value, noting their importance in differing arenas, and moving away from, or complicating, the reactionary "language of the colonizer" stance.

"Unravelling the Dilemma: Examining the Adverse Effects of AI Writing Tools on STEM Student Motivation – Insights from an Academic Writing Center" discusses a Qatari writing center's approach to mitigating negative Generative AI practices among STEM students. Charummal et al.

pose the problem that Generative AI has a negative impact on students' intrinsic motivation when used as a shortcut for completing assignments. As writing center personnel, the authors see this as an opportunity to teach students to use AI productively to enhance writing, learning, and inquiry. Focusing particularly on the writing center's role as a student resource that can mediate production between the academic disciplines, they provide a sampling of how writing center personnel interact with the academic units. This article is important to our collection because it moves the conversation of AI away from a pro/con debate and into a what and how heuristic.

In the interview, "Reflections on the Symposium on The Teaching of Writing in Lebanon: An Interview with Malakeh R. Khoury," Dorota Fleszar and Amy Zenger met with Malakeh R. Khoury to discuss the Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon, an event that aimed to connect teachers of writing across English language medium universities and took place annually over a period of six years. Khoury, who was instrumental in organizing the event, highlights the value of the original vision of the symposium to bring practitioners together to share observations about student practices and pedagogical approaches in the multilingual context of Lebanon. As the symposium grew, it came to include secondary school teachers and focused more on networking and providing workshops for instructors. The interview aims to invite others to archive and build a memory of the symposium, which has been on hold since 2019. To gain insight from the experience of the event, Fleszar and Zenger include reflections on Khoury's interview that highlight the complexities of importing and localizing "best practices;" ways to structure professional empowerment and development; and the need for deepening our research on teaching writing in English language medium contexts.

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"Embracing Multiple Perspectives"[1]: Dynamics of Harmony and Dissonance in English Classroom Discussions

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ABSTRACT

In this study, we examine the discourse patterns unfolding in first-year writing classroom discussions, with attention to the ways those dynamics are informed by broader sociocultural contexts. In examining students' discourse moves through sociocultural lenses, including Hofstede et al.'s (2010) conception of collectivism, we trace patterns of harmony—expressions of agreement or unity—and dissonance—moments of discord or tension—in student discussions. We situate our inquiry in the Socratic Seminar, a student-centered discussion model that invites spaces for the dialogic unfolding of multiple voices and perspectives. We employ a discourse analytic approach to investigate the ways students signal harmonic or dissonant perspectives. In complicating the notions of harmony as unproductive agreement and dissonance as a disruptive force, we elucidate the ways students co-construct knowledge by negotiating a delicate interplay between harmony and dissonance. We illustrate the ways students seek deeper meanings through tonal counterpoint and the dialogic expansion of alternative interpretive possibilities. We also examine how a culturally responsive pedagogy might inform the ways we view and attempt to "move" the discussion. Ultimately, we illuminate insights into the multivocal, multiperspectival nature of student discourse as inflected by sociocultural dimensions.

Keywords: first-year writing, classroom discussion, discourse analysis, sociocultural context

Introduction

In our first-year writing classrooms with mostly Arab students in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, we noticed something different from our American classrooms: there seemed to be a lot of agreement. There were of course times when students disagreed, but the overall tone and flow of the conversation seemed less focused on argument and more focused on harmonizing. Within our existing frameworks, this seemed less productive; after all, we were taught that everything is an argument. But we wondered how studying the discourse patterns unfolding in our class discussions might challenge our perceptions and illuminate for us less argumentative—yet still dialectical—ways of constructing knowledge.

We began to recognize moments of harmony as connected to dynamic cultural influences that shape dialogic interactions within Arabic contexts (Richardson, 2004). Yet at odds with this tendency toward harmony, scholar-practitioners encourage students to "embrace nuance, tension, complexity, and different voices" (Boyd & Sherry, 2024, p. 117), to construct knowledge by engaging with dissonant perspectives. In seeking to disentangle the tensions between harmonic and dissonant dialogue, we investigate the dynamics of students' discourse; we strive to understand the ways students express

agreement, navigate moments of conflict, and invite alternative perspectives. In other words, we investigate the ways students collectively negotiate the construction of knowledge. Ultimately, we aim to discover approaches to supporting students' dialogic engagements in ways that are culturally relevant, that "focus on improving student learning, cultivating cultural competence, and supporting sociopolitical or critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 3). In doing so, we seek to "create opportunities for respectfully discussing multiple ways of seeing and knowing in dialogic space" (Boyd & Sherry, 2024, p. 115) in ways that are resonant with our sociocultural context.

The following questions guide our study:

1. In what ways do patterns of harmony and dissonance emerge in class discussions?
2. How are those patterns illuminated by understanding features of the sociocultural context?
3. How can a culturally responsive pedagogy inform the ways we view the purpose of discussion and best practices for structuring classroom discussion?

Theoretical/ Conceptual Frameworks

Drawing from Bakhtinian theories of heteroglossia, or multivoicedness, we examine the dynamics of student discourse with regard to dialogic space. Bouton et al. (2024) define dialogic space as "a space of possibilities, in which novel, shared meanings and ideas can develop" (p. 183). As Bouton et al. (2024) explain, dialogic space "involves participants both voicing their own perspectives and transcending them in order to attend to and engage with those of their interlocutors" (p. 183). We trace patterns of harmony—expressions of agreement or unity—and dissonance—moments of discord or tension—in students' discussion comments. We conceptualize classroom discourse as a series of rhythmic oscillations between harmony and dissonance, as individual voices that coalesce into harmony and diverge into multiple ways of knowing, thinking, and relating. Extending Nahachewsky & Ward's (2007) study of students' online discussion comments to a synchronous, in-person discussion format, we conceptualize student discourse as contrapuntal: as "visibly polyphonic and layered" voices poised in counterpoint (p. 60).

In this study, we draw from the analytical method of discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2015; Fairclough, 2010). Fairclough (2010) defines discourse analysis as the "analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments" (p. 4). As Fairclough (2003) writes, language is "dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life" (p. 2). We employ Fairclough's (2003) three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis, which includes: "(a) the linguistic description of the formal properties of the text; (b) the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes/interaction and the text, and finally, (c) the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality" (Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018, p. 14). Following Fairclough (2003), we intervene in the "oscillating" (p. 2), dialectical nature of language and social practices, which we conceptualize as mutually transformative dimensions. As our analysis illustrates, the textual features of students' discussion comments reveal the discursive patterns of

harmony and dissonance, which in turn illuminate insights into the dynamics of discourse within the "social and cultural reality." We investigate an intricate interplay of text and context: the complex layering of student dialogue with/in the broader sociocultural contexts in which we teach and learn.

We employ two intersecting levels of analysis: the sonata form (exposition, development, recapitulation, coda) and the discourse move (e.g., opening, building, agreeing, countering, etc.). We explain each level of analysis in greater detail below.

1.1 Sonata Form

In imbuing discourse with a musical dimension, we began our analysis by drawing on the sonata form, with its movement from exposition to development and recapitulation. Each Socratic Seminar circle discussion we interpreted as a "movement" with an opening and closing, a narrative arc reaching toward resolution or expanding reverberations. We were especially interested in the development of "contrasting musical statements…treated dialectically…[and] brought into change and conflict" before they were "restated in a new light" in the recapitulation (Jacobson, 2025). The sonata form offered a structure for analysing the dynamics of harmony and dissonance in classroom discussions: for instance, moments of dis/agreement during the discussions can be interpreted as dialectical tensions resolved into harmony. This musical metaphor helped shed light on the dimensionality of discourse.

However, as our analysis progressed, we recognized the limitations of a traditionally European musical form to interpret conversational moves, and we began exploring Middle Eastern musical traditions, which are characterized by rhythm and prosody, inflected by shifting tonalities and cadences. The waslat, for example, is a series of compositions that begins with an instrumental piece and moves between solo pieces that emphasize improvisational skill, and "vocal pieces with instrumental accompaniment" (Taufiq, 2011) that are more choral in nature. As we illustrate below, students' discourse carries an improvisational quality: a call and response, a sound into echo, as individual voices reverberate into choral responses. We thus illuminate the ways the syncopated instances of harmony and dissonance playfully subvert and complicate the narrative progression of the sonata structure.

1.2 Discourse Moves

We draw on existing scholarship on discourse patterns in classroom discussion (Delahunty, 2018; Nennig et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2016). Delahunty (2018) investigated discourse moves in university students' asynchronous online forum discussions, examining the ways instructors could "effectively facilitate knowledge co-construction" (p. 13). Building on Mercer's (2000) framework, Delahunty (2018) conceptualizes cumulative talk—"the accumulation of ideas that occurs as interactants build

uncritically on each other's ideas" (p. 17)—as the "relatively uncritical acceptance of what partners say" (Mercer, 2000, p. 33). Delahunty's (2018) work informs our examination of the ways students co-construct knowledge and the extent to which students "uncritically accept" or challenge one another's ideas. Similarly, Yu et al. (2016) examined discourse moves in online forum discussions, focusing on students' uniqueness-seeking—the tensions between the desire for belonging and the need to be unique. Yu et al. (2016) found that the participants displayed a moderate degree of uniqueness-seeking. Yu et al's (2016) study is relevant to our emphasis on the social dimensions of discourse interactions, including the tensions that might arise between individual expression and collective harmony. From another perspective, Nennig et al. (2023) sought to "capture the intricacies of student group interactions such as the flow of conversation and nature of student utterances" (p. 1). Nennig et al.'s (2023) framework for visualizing students' discourse moves, including initiating, contributing, and questioning, illuminates discourse moves unfolding over the trajectory of a discussion. Together, these studies highlight the dynamics of student discourse: the interplay of the individual and the collective, the tensions between accepting and challenging one another's ideas.

Given the context of our study in literary interpretation in the English classroom, we draw on VanDerHeide's (2018) categorization of the literary argumentative moves that students make while writing and speaking. These moves include making a claim ("stating an arguable stance"), providing evidence ("giving support, e.g., example, quote, for arguable stance), and providing commentary ("commenting on evidence in a way that works toward showing the reasoning that links evidence to the claim"). We also draw on the sub-moves derived from the moves analysis, which include retelling, stating meaning, pointing to the text, explaining the effect of the device on the reader, explaining the effect of the device on meaning, and connecting to experience. Drawing on VanDerHeide's (2018) categorizations, we identified moves in students' discussion comments including linking examples with meanings, providing commentary, and building on others' ideas. Other moves, including agreeing, disagreeing, countering, and acknowledging limitations in others' ideas, are drawn from the scholarship on discourse moves in class discussion (Delahunty, 2018; Nennig et al., 2023; Yu et al., 2016).

1.3 Scholarship on Sociocultural Contexts

It is culture that creates the conditions in which students express or withhold their perspectives; as Chan and Lee (2021) posit, sociocultural context is what determines "acceptable ways of expressing oneself." In our examination of sociocultural contexts, we build upon Hofstede et al.'s (2010) definition of culture as a "collective phenomenon" that includes "unwritten rules of the social game" (p. 6). Hofstede et al. (2010) further argue that culture is a kind of "collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group… from others" (p. 6). In an educational setting, cultural group membership is reified through interactions that position students in relationship to one another, the instructor, and the learning environment.

To illuminate the sociocultural factors in our setting, we draw upon literature that examines Western teaching practices in Arab contexts. In their study of the use of debate as a strategy in Saudi classrooms, Alghamdi et al. (2022) concluded that there were unique challenges involved in deploying a strategy within "an educational context that is conventionally teacher centered" (p. 127). Similarly, Martin's (2006) study of implementing highly interactive online learning programs in the United Arab Emirates found that a "paradigm shift" (p. 24) was needed for the Emirati students in her study to transition from a more "teacher-centric learning model" (p. 24) to a more learner-centric model.

Additional literature highlights the specific cultural features of Saudi society. Students' discourse may be driven or suppressed by deferential or oppositional rhetorical moves (Chan & Lee, 2021; Romanowski et al., 2018) and Arab students' collectivist mentality might influence the tenor of class discussion. Jiang et al. (2018) define collectivism as a focus on "community, society, or nation" (p. 145), and they draw upon multiple studies that not only showed broadly that Middle Eastern cultures were more collectivist than Western cultures, but also showed specifically that "Saudi Arabia scored much higher than the USA and the UK in Hofstede et al.'s (2010) measurement of collectivism" (p. 145). This collective mindset "influences every corner of Saudi life" (p. 145). In contrast to the more deficit approach of Martin's (2006) study, Richardson's (2004) study of Arab students' reflective practices noted that students were often moving toward "equilibrium, harmony and balance" in their reflections. While students from a collectivist society still engage in robust dissonant dialogue (as our study will illustrate), their attentiveness to community contextualizes their approach to discussion.

Educators from an American context are likely to view too much harmony and equilibrium as unproductive. Wilkie and Ayalon (2023) label harmonious discussion as "consensual co-construction" and argue that when ideas are "not challenged or criticized," it ultimately "restrict[s] the opportunity for deep thinking" (p. 2). Wilkie and Ayalon's (2023) critique of consensual co-construction reflects a tradition in Western scholarship that tends to view disagreement as more useful than agreement. The very language academics use to frame writing ("argument") connotes dissonance.

While not all harmonious discussion is productive (just as not all disagreement is productive), there may be culturally inflected ways that instructors perceive harmony and dissonance in classroom discussion. The literature suggests that American instructors might be culturally primed to view dissonance as more conducive to deep thinking, while their Arab students might have their views of discussion shaped by the collectivist mindset they bring to the classroom.

In sum, this study offers three layers of analysis: 1) the sonata form, with its musical metaphors; 2) discourse moves in students' discussion comments; and 3) the sociocultural contexts in which students' discourse moves are situated. While scholarship has examined discourse moves in class

discussions, our contribution enriches the analysis of discourse with a sociocultural element. In examining students' multivocal dialogue, we investigate how a greater understanding of discussion moves and sociocultural contexts can help us open space for multivocal expressions.

Methods

Study Context

We situate our inquiry in the Socratic Seminar, a student-centered discussion model in which students in an inner circle discuss a common text while members of an outer circle observe and comment upon the inner circle discussion. We have selected the Socratic Seminar as our site of inquiry due to its potential for inviting a layered, dynamic, multivocal dialogue that decentres the teacher and encourages students' active participation (Strong, 1994). Moreover, the structure of a Socratic Seminar, with its layers of commentary and metacommentary, supports students' meta-awareness of the multiperspectival nature of dialogue.

We engaged students in a Socratic Seminar discussion of the TED Talk "The Danger of a Single Story" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009). We selected Adichie's (2009) talk due to its emphasis on the harm caused by stereotypes and the power of appreciating multiple perspectives: ideas that might resonate with our culturally diverse, multilingual student population.

We recognize the cultural tensions arising when using a Western pedagogical technique in a Middle Eastern context. To mitigate tensions between the students' assumed teacher authority and the teachers' desired student agency, our Socratic Seminars are literally and figuratively student-centered, as the instructor sits outside both circles and the students face only each other. The questions that guide discussion are posted on the board, so the students themselves have the agency to decide when to close discussion and move on to the next question.

Data Collection

We collected data, including transcripts of class discussions and students' journal responses, from approximately 360 students from across 11 sections of first-year writing classes. Students' majors include business, engineering, medicine, and life sciences. The majority of our students identify as Muslim, come from Arab backgrounds, and live in the Middle East. However, our student population is international and multilingual, with students coming from 44 countries. Students identify primarily as coming from the Middle East (including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Turkey), but also from North Africa (including Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria), South Asia (including India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh), North America, and Europe. We collected data during the spring 2023 and 2024 semesters, and our study was approved by the institution's IRB[2].

We are assistant professors at a relatively small (~4,000 students), highly ranked private university in Saudi Arabia. Following either completion of an intensive English program or an IELTS score that qualifies students for direct admission, the required first-year writing (FYW) curriculum follows a scope and sequence similar to that of FYW programs in Western universities. As American professors teaching majority Arab-background students, there are numerous ways in which differences in our "collective programming" (Hofstede et al., 2010) emerge, including the expectations and communication styles we bring to class discussions.

Sources of Data Collected

1. Students' opening journal entries written in response to a quotation from Adichie's (2009) TED Talk (conducted prior to the discussion)
2. Transcription of the Socratic Seminar discussion (transcribed by the teacher and/or outer circle participants)
3. Students' outer circle metacommentary on the inner circle's discussion
4. Students' closing journal responses (conducted after the discussion):
    - reflection on the ways students' thinking about the topic may have shifted over the course of the discussion

Data Analysis

We employed a discourse analysis framework to analyse the transcribed discussions and journal responses. We qualitatively coded each class's discussion by employing two intersecting levels of analysis: the sonata form and the discourse move. First, we identified the phases or segments of each discussion based on the sonata form (e.g., exposition, development, recapitulation, coda). Then, we coded individual student comments for discourse moves, drawing from VanDerHeide's (2018) coding framework for English language arts responses, which correlates with the italicized themes we identified (e.g., agreeing [harmony]; building on others' ideas [expansion]; disagreeing, countering, acknowledging limitations in others' ideas [dissonance, counterpoint, countermelody]; identifying examples from the text; linking examples with meanings; inviting others to contribute). We coded the discourse moves as embedded within the larger sonata structure. For instance, the discourse move opening the discussion functions as what we might read as the exposition in a sonata or the sama'i in a waslat (Taufiq, 2011). We ensured inter-coder reliability by comparing the work of two coders for the same transcript. Based on the emerging codes, we composed individual close analyses of each class discussion. We then synthesized the close analyses by identifying common themes, which aided in the development of findings.

Findings

In this section, we highlight the findings from our analysis of students' discourse, including expressions of harmony, followed by expressions of dissonance.

Harmony

Call and Response: Harmonious Movements Toward Personal Revelation

The following excerpt from a class discussion illustrates instances of harmony:

> **Joud**[3]: I noticed something I understood from my perspective. One time I met a girl in the airport and another person had asked her if she went to school riding camels.
> **Multiple people in the circle**: Me too!
> **Hala**: My brother plays video games and when people learn he's in Saudi, they're like "you have computers there?" People have an ignorant view. We all have ignorance.

This discussion excerpt, in response to the question "What do you notice about the ideas and arguments in [Adichie's (2009)] talk?" commences with personal connection as Joud mentions a girl who encountered stereotypes like those Adichie (2009) related. Joud personalizes Adichie's (2009) perspective by shifting the stereotypes from Africa to the Middle East. She describes understanding Adichie's (2009) argument "from my perspective" and she is met with a choral response: several students say, "me too!", creating a high harmonic note. Expanding the harmonization while using the same melodic theme, Hala offers another example of experiencing prejudice. This example shows a misconception of Saudi Arabia that is similar to the camel-riding comment, depicting the country as underdeveloped and lacking essentials ("when people learn he's in Saudi, they're like 'you have computers there?'"). However, Hala's development changes the discussion by extracting a general principle about humanity from these examples ("People have an ignorant view"). Her commentary is meaning making, ascribing a cause to the group's examples. And then, using the first-person plural pronoun "we," she goes further to include herself and her classmates among the ignorant ("We all have ignorance").

The exposition connects the students' own stories about stereotypes to Adichie's (2009) stories, sounding a clear note of resonance, but not mere "uncritical acceptance" (Mercer, 2000). The development then expands to a principle about humanity recognized in stereotyping behaviour. Then Hala brings the discussion back to a personal recognition of her own ignorance. This passage from the discussion illustrates an interplay of sound and echo that is characteristic of Middle Eastern musical styles, in which "melodic instruments—such as the nāy (flute), zornā (double-reed instrument), ʿūd (short-necked lute), and santūr (trapezoidal zither)—play in unison with the solo line during the composed parts and echo it one or two beats behind in the improvised parts" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011). In this instance, the accompanying voices, the others

listening to Joud, the soloist, echo the soloist in a rhythmic incantation as the students sound voices in unison, creating a sense of harmony. Like a waslat that alternates between instrumental and solo pieces, the echoing of "Me too!" opens space for expansion of dialogue: for the recognition of a shared culpability.

In this group's response to the next discussion question, there are three movements.

> *Question: What do you notice about the language and style Adichie employs?*
> **Leen**: She employed a lot of jokes.
> **Hala**: She was smart with how she phrased it, not just one side of the story. She said "I also make the mistake myself." That way her listeners are more accepting.
> **Leen**: She uses a more narrative style. A lot of stories from her childhood.
> **Hala**: Yeah it's ironic. She's talking about stories by using stories.
> **Leen**: We have stereotypes about, like, our drivers. We see them as poor, we see them only one way.
> **Hala**: I feel like that's really true. I realized this when I met someone from India and she told me about it.

Leen and Hala are in a call-and-response sequence of exposition and development. Leen introduces a topic that Hala develops, three times in a row.

In the first movement, Leen identifies Adichie's (2009) use of jokes. Hala develops Leen's theme by pointing out another strategy that makes Adichie's (2009) audience more "accepting": admitting that she too "make[s] the mistake" of stereotyping. Hala labels this move as "smart." The second technique she points out has the same effect as humour: making listeners more receptive.

In the second movement, there is a tonal shift as Leen states that Adichie (2009) "uses a more narrative style" and then expands the melody by pointing out that Adichie (2009) tells "a lot of stories from her childhood." Hala's development recasts Leen's comment, identifying the irony of Adichie (2009) talking about stories by using stories.

In the third and final movement, Leen returns to the motif of the first question, but in a more personal key. The first discussion of stereotyping went as far as collective ("we") but not personal ("I") responsibility. Leen expands on the earlier theme by providing an example of a stereotyped group in her country: drivers, who tend to be primarily from south Asian countries. ("We have stereotypes about, like, our drivers. We see them as poor, we see them only one way.") Leen provides both exposition in the current conversation and development of the earlier conversation. Drawing on the linguistic themes Adichie (2009) uses ("see them as poor" and "see them only one way"), Leen creates a triple harmony: with Adichie (2009), with the earlier discussion, and with Hala's comment about how admitting your mistakes makes the audience more accepting. This triple

harmonizing amplifies the melodic theme and allows for the discussion to move even deeper. Striking a personal note, Hala observes "I realized this when I met someone from India and she told me about it." Here, Hala resolves the earlier atmosphere of frustration at stereotypes into balance by acknowledging her personal complicity ("I") in stereotyping others. Two processes are happening simultaneously: students are understanding Adichie's (2009) text through the lens of their experiences and they are also understanding their experiences through the lens of Adichie's (2009) text.

A harmonious sequence pushes the theme of culpability and then backs off and then revisits it from a different angle. This movement can be tracked through students' use of close or distant pronouns: from "they" to "us" to "them" to "we" to "she" to "them" to "she" to "we" to "I." It is perhaps this movement that opens space for the "I" to emerge and builds the atmosphere of safety that allows for vulnerable personal applications of Adichie's (2009) message. It is this focus on "community, society, or nation" that embodies the collectivist approach characterized by Jiang et al. (2018).

According to Taufiq (2011), "what characterizes the typical sound of Arabic music" is that "it repeatedly plays around the notes in slight variations, without the musician losing sight of the keynote." The unfolding interchange between Leen and Hala can be read as playing around a note in a series of slight variations or rhythmic reverberations oscillating between closeness and distance. Indeed, the variations of Arabic music occur in "far smaller tonal steps" (Taufiq, 2011), and the subtle shifts in dialogue illuminate the profundity of dialectical negotiations underlying seemingly slight tonal variations: from this delicate interplay of intertonalities emerges a cascade of intersubjectivities—a movement from distance toward intimacy, a shifting inward from others to ourselves, from the communal to the individual, from observation to recognition.

Reverberating Resonances: The Dialogic Expansion of Ideas Through Harmony

As the following excerpt illustrates, harmony could manifest not only as agreement or unity but as an expansion of ideas that reverberate outward:

> **Sana**: [reading the discussion question] "What do you notice about the ideas and arguments in the talk?"
> **Lamia**: I noticed that it was based on her own experiences.
> **Sana**: Yeah, it's her story, but we've each lived our version of the story.
> **Manal**: She's been exposed to different stories, leading her to be more aware and understanding of what the reality is.
> **Abiha**: It could also be about how children could be impressionable, the more children are exposed to different narratives.

This passage carries an accumulative cadence. The students' comments move outward from Adichie's (2009) personal experience toward individual manifestations of a shared experience, and

subsequently toward the dimension of perception and relationality: Adichie's (2009) "awareness," "understanding," and "exposure to different stories." Each student's comment expands the interpretive theme while recasting the ideas in a different key: for instance, Sana agrees in part with Lamia's comment ("Yeah, it's her story"), while shifting the emphasis ("but we've each lived our version of the story"). The discussion progresses from the domain of individual experience toward collective experience and awareness of a shared "reality." In further expanding the discussion, Abiha invites an alternative interpretation of the ways children could be "impressionable." By employing the phrase "It could also be about…", Abiha signals a recognition of multiple interpretive possibilities. By inviting alternative interpretations, students open interpretive possibilities through dialogic expansion. In a sequence, the interpretations invite multilayered resonances that unfurl outward. Harmony is defined as "the structure of music with respect to the composition and progression of chords" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). In attuning to the cadences of the conversation, we might envision harmony as a succession of chords vibrating across harmonic intervals, as movement toward the interpersonal, relational dimension. Yet beyond a simple harmonic progression, as in a European music scale, this passage illustrates "a spontaneous unfolding" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2012) of ideas more characteristic of an Arabic scale that moves in tones, semitones, and even quartertones: a continual expansion outward of tonal resonances and cultural significances.

Dissonance

In contrast with the instances of harmony above, students' discourse also reveals moments of dissonance—discord or tension.

> *Question: What do you notice about the language and style Adichie employs?*
> **Nouf**: She gives a lot of stories as examples to support her ideas.
> **Leenah**: It's her point of view.
> **Nouf**: It's not only her point of view.
> **Leenah**: It's centered on her but she includes other stories.
> **Rima**: She refused to show herself as a victim.
> **Nourah**: She tried to relate to her audience so they could see themselves in her stories.

In this excerpt, multiple speakers comment rapidly, and dissonant notes emerge and then are resolved through clever recapitulation that reconciles opposing views. Nouf's exposition identifies Adichie's (2009) narrative style, her rhetorical use of stories. Leenah develops the theme by commenting that these stories represent Adichie's (2009) "point of view."

The dissonance begins when Nouf counters Leenah's statement, claiming that these stories do not merely represent Adichie's (2009) point of view. Leenah then counters with a concession ("she includes other stories") buffered by a reiteration of her first point ("it's centered on her").

The discussion's momentum is in full swing as Rima chimes in that Adichie (2009) "refused to show herself as a victim." Perhaps making a move to dispel the tension by redirecting the conversation, Rima develops Leenah's point by discussing how Adichie (2009) portrayed herself in her stories. However, Nourah's recapitulation is what truly resolves the dissonance and restores harmony ("She tried to relate to her audience so they could see themselves in her stories"). Nourah points out that Adichie's (2009) stories were not only an expression of her point of view but opened the possibility for others to "see themselves." In doing so, she demonstrates that Leenah's note ("it's her point of view") and Nouf's note ("it's not only her point of view") are resolvable into a single melody. The dialogue unfolds in a spontaneous initiation and response fashion in which the responses echo yet diffract the initiations ("It's her point of view" … "It's not only her point of view"). The succession of sound and echo creates an improvisational quality: the syncopated instances of harmony and dissonance complicate a linear progression from exposition to development to recapitulation. And indeed, a "delight in improvisation" is one of the most important features of Arabic music (Taufiq, 2011). In the classical Arabic musical tradition, it is the musician's responsibility to vary the piece according to the occasion, the time of day, and the audience–a highly rhetorically responsive practice. Contrary to what Wilkie and Ayalon (2023) posited, students' opportunities for deep thinking were not restricted by a focus on harmony. Rather, it is from the improvisational interplay of harmony and dissonance that insight emerges, through a spontaneous syncopation of voices, an expansive synthesis of perspectives, an incessant unfolding of creation.

Reconciling the "Opposition of Tonalities" Through Dissonance

Similar to the excerpt above, the following excerpt illustrates a complex tonal interplay between melody and countermelody:

Faheem: [reading the discussion question] "What do you notice about the language and style Adichie employs?"
Kabir: [Adichie] was confident, she impressed the audience, the accent was American Nigerian, and her voice was pretty loud.
Faheem: — but she wasn't trying to be someone else —
Kabir: She wasn't fake, she was herself.
Faheem: [reading the discussion question] "What kinds of evidence, strategies, and techniques are incorporated?" [Adichie] uses active stories.
Kabir: She uses storybooks and examples.
Adam: She relates her childhood abroad.
Kabir: She was transparent with the audience. She was emphasizing the points; overall, she was —
Faheem: She wasn't speaking in a loud voice.
Kabir: The audience knew what she was saying.

In a dialectical interplay of initiation and response, voices are poised in counterpoint: Kabir's comment that Adichie's (2009) "voice was pretty loud" is undercut by Faheem's response that "she wasn't trying to be someone else." Faheem strikes a note of discord, yet this moment is quickly resolved into harmony. In his response, Kabir concedes to Faheem by means of negation ("She wasn't fake") before phrasing the comment in a positive light: Adichie (2009) was true to herself. By acknowledging Faheem's counterpoint before shifting into a positive key, Kabir recasts the dissonance into harmony, reconciling the "opposition of tonalities" (Jacobson, 2025). Following a fleeting moment of discord, tonal balance is restored.

Yet as in a musical movement, a strain of dissonance re-emerges a few lines later: when Kabir comments on the empathic nature of the speech, Faheem counters that "[Adichie] wasn't speaking in a loud voice." Echoing the tonal interplay from a few lines earlier, Kabir quickly restores equilibrium by acknowledging the shared understanding between Adichie (2009) and the audience. From the fragments of discord emerge a thread of resolution as the dialogue initiates a "movement in[to] a new state of equilibrium" that closes the sonata structure (Jacobson, 2025). The tonal complexities of this dialogue—its shifting contours of melody and countermelody—challenge our constriction of it to sonata form. Through spontaneous back-and-forth exchanges, the dialogue resists closure, probing assumptions and interrogating conceptions surrounding voice, selfhood, and relationality.

In this discussion, the theme of Adichie's (2009) voice reappears as a recurring motif in a chromatic tension between point and counterpoint. The dialogue carries an undercurrent of dissonance, exposing the racialized and gendered undertones associated with referring to Adichie, a Nigerian American woman, as "speaking in a loud voice." In each instance identified above, Faheem, a Sudanese student, problematizes the notion that Adichie's (2009) voice could be construed as "loud" or as other than her own. Yet these moments of conflict invite pathways toward deeper meanings: Kabir's acknowledgment that "[Adichie] wasn't fake, she was herself" implies a connection between voice and selfhood—an authentic self rather than a performative one. Similarly, Kabir's comment that "the audience knew what she was saying" suggests a shared sense of understanding between the speaker, Adichie, and her audience—a mutual capacity for recognition. Through intervals of "change and conflict" (Jacobson, 2025), the dialogue is brought into deeper layers of revelation as the students negotiate themes of identity and relationality.

The students' comments could be analysed as instances of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, in the way that the dialogue unfolds through contradictory viewpoints. Resonating with the focus of the analysis, the content of the discussion likewise involves vocality: the amplification of Adichie's (2009) voice through vocal emphasis and the association of volume ("a pretty loud voice") with racialized and gendered ramifications. Even as students voice their thoughts on Adichie's (2009) voice, attuning to the sonic dimensions of Adichie's language, in turn, we are attuned to the aural dynamics of students' discourse.

Discussion

This study illuminates the ways students collectively negotiate meaning through a layered unfolding of discourse. We conceptualize student discourse as polyphonic, as a weaving together of voices into a synthesis of understanding. In attuning closely to the intricacies of student discourse using a discourse analytic method (van Leeuwen, 2015; Fairclough, 2010), we understand the dynamics of dialogic interaction: students invite spaces for the interpretive possibility of new meaning, deepen their understandings of thematic resonances, and craft narratives of shared identity. In revealing the "dialectically interconnected" interplay of language and social life (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2), the discourse patterns of harmony and dissonance shed light on the dialectical nature of knowledge construction within our sociocultural context. In complicating the notion of harmony as uncritical agreement and dissonance as a disruptive force, we illuminate the ways students co-construct knowledge.

Complicating Harmony

Beyond its associations with uncritical agreement (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), we could recast harmony as productive for the co-construction of knowledge. The students' dialogue illustrates the ways harmony offers spaces for constructing shared experiences and negotiating collective identity and belonging. By harmonizing with one another and with Adichie's (2009) talk, students articulate their own perspectives as refracted through the lens of Adichie's (2009) narrative. In challenging the notion that harmony is merely "polite parallel sharing" (Boyd & Sherry, 2024, p. 117) the students' dialogue illuminates the ways harmony could open spaces for vulnerability in ways that encourage them to express personal connections to the text. Harmony carries deep resonances that reverberate across sociocultural dimensions: through engaging in harmonic discourse, students co-construct knowledge while crafting narratives of selfhood.

The students' ideas resonate in harmony with one another, yet we could conceptualize this harmony as not merely "equilibrium, harmony, and balance" (Richardson, 2004), but also as dialogic expansion, a recognition of multiple possible interpretations. Phrases from students' discussion comments such as "It could also be about" open up dialogic spaces for alternative perspectives, inviting "a language of possibility" (Boyd & Sherry, 2024, p. 118) for the expansion of ideas. Echoing Bakhtinian heteroglossia, students' interpretations of the multiple possible significances of Adichie's (2009) talk could be conceived as multiple layers of meaning resounding in harmony. We thus illuminate the potential for harmony to invite generative meaning in a perpetual unfolding of ideas.

Complicating Dissonance

In moments of dissonance, students offer divergent viewpoints. As in the movement of a wave or a musical line, students' dialogue alternates between harmony and dissonance and is eventually

reconciled into harmony. In complicating the notion that interlocutors challenge one another's ideas in order to "score points and win rather than engage with the substance of conflicting ideas" (Bouton et al, 2024, p. 183), we illustrate the ways dissonance produces rich meaning in a synchrony of discordant sounds. By navigating instances of "contrapuntal tension" (Nahachewsky & Ward, 2007), students collectively negotiate conflicting perspectives while striving toward deeper understandings of identity and relationality.

By expanding conceptions of harmony beyond "consensual co-construction" (Wilkie & Ayalon, 2023, p. 2) and "uncritical acceptance" (Mercer, 2000, p. 33), we view harmony as more nuanced and potentially generative. As our analysis illustrates, harmony opens spaces for nurturing personal explorations, attuning to shared resonances, and inviting a dialogic expansion of ideas. Yet we recognize the value of dissonance in challenging assumptions and creating more critically aware conceptions. In stimulating the dialogic construction of knowledge, we encourage students to recognize multiple interpretations and to seek new ways of knowing.

Through the contrapuntal interplay of harmony and dissonance emerges resonance: "the intensification and enriching of a musical tone by supplementary vibration," "a quality of richness or variety," or "a quality of evoking response" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). Students' comments strike a chord with one another as many voices coalesce in moments of synchrony. Resonance enriches the tonality of discourse as it unfolds over intervals of initiation and response, sound and echo. In a movement from vibration to reverberation, voices reverberate in empathy with others.

Complicating the Sonata Form

Significantly, the students' dialogue complicates the existing musical classifications based on the sonata structure. In its improvisational quality, the dynamics of movement in the discussion unsettle the linear narrative progression from exposition into recapitulation that characterizes the sonata form: in the unfolding dialogue, the dialectical interplay of sound, echo, and reverberation invites richer repercussions of resonance characteristic of Middle Eastern musical traditions. In a fluid interweaving of voices, the expansive choral harmonies intermingle with undercurrents of dissonance. The symphonic progression of the sonata form eludes the dynamic complexity of the students' dialogue, in its oscillating syncopations between harmony and dissonance. In spontaneous back-and-forth exchanges, students expose, critique, and complicate ideas in a dialectical fashion, disrupting a sense of linearity, exposing gaps, resisting closure. Imbued with rhythmic cadences and tonal juxtaposition, students' dialogue inhabits a continual state of flux, oscillating between point and counterpoint, melody and countermelody, poised in contrapuntal tension (Nawachewsky & Ward, 2007) with one another's ideas. The improvisational quality of the exchanges—the moments of spontaneous expression, the subtle shifts in tone or cadence—gives rise to a depth of insight and revelation that may elude the traditional sonata form, inviting the unfurling of ideas from personal unto societal realms. The shifting tonal complexities thus stimulate deeper dialogical interactions,

opening spaces for interrogating one's own conceptions while negotiating alternative perspectives. In exposing the "oscillating" intertwining of texts and social practices (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2), the shapes of discourse illustrate the dynamic contours of dialectical negotiations in their unfolding into deeper dimensions of knowing.

Students' Reflections

In opening spaces of dialogic possibility, we echo the way Adichie (2009) calls for the audience to recognize the multifaceted nature of stories. The structure of a Socratic Seminar invites spaces for the dialogic interplay of multiple perspectives. Students' closing reflections express an understanding of the importance of embracing multiple perspectives:

Mila's Reflection: My classmates assisted me to comprehend the importance of acknowledging various perspectives and narratives. Their perspectives showed that a single story can shape one's perception and interaction with people and culture, stressing the need for a more holistic approach to comprehending people and cultures. This reminded me of how vital dialogue is and how we should embrace multiples of perspectives.

Arwa's Reflection: From this discussion I gained the skill to look at a topic from multiple directions like how my colleagues did. I only thought of how the speaker used a personal experience to convey her message but my colleague saw that in another way also, i.e. how [Adichie, 2009] focuses on literature as that is something that makes us all unite and eases our understanding.

Soha's Reflection: By discussing our various ideas, I can see myself looking at Adichie's (2009) words through a different perspective that I might have skimmed over otherwise. As Adichie says, there's always more than one side to a story and that applies to people's interpretations as well.

Importantly, students signal a recognition of multiple interpretive possibilities, articulating the benefits of engaging in dialogue with those who hold different perspectives. In her closing reflection, Soha expresses an epistemic openness, recognizing the way multiple perspectives are present not only in the ideas in Adichie's (2009) talk, but also in the interpretive process.

Discussion Reflections and Insights

It was quietly moving to witness Adichie's (2009) ideas on the multidimensionality of stories refracted through the lenses of students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Students' comments illustrated the interplay of the text with the reader/viewer. Interspersed within the dialogue are vocalized murmurs of assent or dissent, communion or contradiction. Such interstitial instances spark moments of recognition, inspiring a mutual sense of belonging and awakening self-awareness. Students' dialogue illuminates insights into the power of multiple stories, yet the students' insights are refracted through a different angle as they shifted the frame of reference from

the West to the Middle East, exposing misconceptions about the Middle East while creating spaces for a heightened intercultural awareness. In interpreting their experiences through the lens of the text, students invite new ways of seeing themselves in relation to others. Dialogue thus emerges as a space through which to craft the self in the world.

Our students tread the interstices of cultures, informed by a keen consciousness of global perspectives. Many of our students have lived and attended school internationally in North America, Europe, and Asia as well as in the Middle East, "birthing hybrid or 'third' cultures that are globe-spanning, diverse, highly empathic and oftentimes difficult to translate outside these environments" (Brara, 2020). Students thus bring perspectives that are simultaneously culturally diverse yet enriched with a deep sense of shared Arabic identity, a mix that inspires a dynamic interplay between harmony and dissonance, at once inviting an echoing of choral communion and a seeking of divergent insights. Such incessant oscillations between equilibrium and discord spark a continual negotiation of knowledge as it unfolds at the interface of stasis and dynamism. In illuminating the shifting complexities of student discourse, our findings thus seek to complicate Hofstede et al.'s (2010) conception of collectivism as a reified phenomenon: through the interweaving of shifting tonalities—an interplay of the individual and the communal, self and world—students (re)shape the contours of culture, identity, subjectivity, and relationality, extending the boundaries of discursive imaginaries. In this sense, students are not only reified or shaped by collectivist cultures but actively construct and shape the telling of their stories. Even as our students navigate a multiplicity of perspectives, the broader undercurrents of our sociocultural context likewise invite tensions between stasis and change: we envision Saudi Arabia, on the eve of Vision 2030, as inhabiting a kairotic moment; fluid, dynamic, and shifting, at the cusp of transformation, at the interstices of tradition and innovation. Our students and context thus act as a catalyst for new writing studies pedagogies, inviting novel forms of criticality inflected and enriched by intercultural dynamics.

As we noted at the beginning of this article, our motivation for implementing a Socratic Seminar discussion stemmed from our observations that during our in-class discussions, students' ideas tended to harmonize with each other. We thus aimed to encourage spaces for divergent, even contradictory perspectives while also challenging our ideas of what constitutes productive discussion. One challenge of presenting this Socratic Seminar activity was that some students were less accustomed to student-centered discussions, having experienced more teacher-centered models (Alghamdi et al., 2022); only a few had participated in a Socratic Seminar prior to our class activity. Students were initially hesitant to speak, and in the quieter classes, we encouraged students to each take turns sharing their initial thoughts as a way of breaking the ice and nurturing students' confidence. In observing the dynamics of the discussions, we found that students served as natural discussion leaders who opened each circle by posing the questions presented on the slides and inviting their peers to contribute ideas. Yet from the midst of the challenges emerged a richer, more rewarding experience: we were inspired by the ways students gleaned new insights into the importance of multiple perspectives and came to a deeper understanding of their own identities and

experiences, ideas that they might not otherwise have explored. Students' reflections illustrate their expanded appreciation for the multiplicity of stories and of discourse itself.

In offering pedagogical implications, we seek to invite spaces for multivocal dialogue. By incorporating student-centered discussions such as Socratic Seminars, teachers could foster the collaborative construction of knowledge. Teachers could scaffold the discussion in ways that support students to build on others' ideas, pose questions, make personal applications, and introduce alternative perspectives. For instance, teachers could provide harmonious sentence starters (e.g., "Building on this idea," "This also made me think of… ") and dissonant sentence starters ("This moment could be interpreted differently," "From an alternative perspective… "). By connecting language choices with meaningful responses, instructors could render visible for students the ways discourse moves are realized in specific language choices. Offering an "explicit attention to language itself" (Schleppegrell, 2013, p. 156) could be especially valuable for supporting multilingual learners. In stimulating processes of reflection, teachers could help students examine the text through the lens of their experiences and examine their experiences through the lens of the text. In journal responses, students could not only reflect on how their thinking has changed but on how their ways of thinking may have changed following the discussion. Such reflections can enhance students' metacognitive awareness of their learning, inspiring "thinking about thinking" (Flavell, 1976).

In this study, we have sought to illuminate the dynamic, multivocal, relational nature of knowledge construction. We conceptualize students' discourse as dialogic relations of intersubjectivity, "the interchange of thoughts and feelings, both conscious and unconscious, between two persons or 'subjects,' as facilitated by empathy" (Cooper-White, 2014). In negotiating mutually interrelated subjectivities, students' dialogue reveals a movement between inward and outward relations, between observation and personalization. In the shift from "we" to "I," "we approach the other as a subject… valu[ing] one another's ideas, thoughts and feelings as worthy of consideration in and of themselves" (Bouton et al., 2024, p. 184); we come to see the self in the other, the other in oneself, a mutually transformative recognition. For the students, as for the teachers, it is through harmonic and dissonant discussion that we arrive at deeper understandings of ourselves, the texts we study, and the sociocultural contexts we inhabit.

Notes

1. A quoted excerpt from a student's closing journal reflection
2. IRB number: 20220
3. All student names are pseudonyms. We have secured permission from individual students to publish their discussion comments and written reflections.

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Measuring Writing Across the Curriculum in Nursing Education: The Role and Support of Learning to Write by Writing

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ABSTRACT

Multiple push and pull factors exert themselves on the planning, organization, and assessment of writing assignments across undergraduate nursing curricula. Such factors may lead to a lack of faculty awareness around the role, type, length, and evaluation of writing tasks. This report discusses one institution's efforts to understand Writing Across the Curriculum. Researchers analysed syllabi's written work requirements for all courses, classifying tasks by type, required length, relative difficulty, grade weight, and characterization by Bloom's Taxonomy level. Findings revealed unanticipated volumes and variance of writing genres and a largely scaffolded curriculum, despite lack of direct, top-down pre-planning. Reflection on the process uncovered what the authors term "Learning to Write by Writing" (LWW), an overarching descriptor not encompassed by Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing to Learn (WTL), or Writing in the Discipline (WID), and the critical role of Writing Centres in supporting LWW among faculty.

Background

> *We have way too much writing in our curriculum. Sometimes I wonder why I'm working so hard to grade these long academic papers when after graduation our students won't be doing this kind of writing anyway.*
>
> *Our students would benefit from more scholarly writing assignments. Aren't we supposed to be preparing them to write so they have the option of graduate studies in the future?*
>
> *Writing helps develop critical thinking in nurses. If anything, we need to add more writing assignments to our curriculum.*
>
> *I think our writing assignments are weighted too heavily towards academic issues like APA referencing guidelines. Is that really important in the long run?*
>
> *Do we actually* know *how much writing there is in our curriculum? Has anyone actually ever added the amount of writing up?*

Comments such as the above, presented here as composite paraphrases of ongoing discussions in the authors' institutional committees, may be familiar to nurse educators everywhere. While the issues may be easily recognizable to nursing faculty, achieving consensus on them is not. A wide divergence of opinion is typical on issues such as: the amount of writing that should be required for undergraduates; the types of writing tasks nursing students should be asked to do; the relative difficulty and importance of each type; and the weight of writing assignments relative to other graded components of nursing courses.

The authors of this study, while in discussion with the curriculum committee and while negotiating the divergence of opinion on writing amounts, types, and importance, realized a crucial preliminary step had been overlooked: we did not *know* how much writing there was in our undergraduate nursing curriculum. Without actual data on amounts, types, difficulty, and relative weight of writing assignments, how could we productively discuss what *ought* to be asked of our students? This article describes the process of how one institution, through a deliberate and measured process of data collection and analysis, examined the place of writing in its own undergraduate nursing curriculum.

Writing and the Nursing Profession

Scholarly, academic writing is an important skill for nurses as it is central to their work as clinicians, leaders, advocates, scholars, and educators, among other roles. Nursing professionals use written communication to document patient care (Jefferies et al., 2010), create patient educational materials (Mayer & Villaire, 2009), communicate effectively with other healthcare professionals who may not be directly involved in a patient's care, for legal and credentialing purposes (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2010), and to prepare manuscripts for publication (Oermann, 2023).

The need for nursing professionals to write, then, would naturally find its way back into the undergraduate nursing curriculum which prepares them for professional practice. Writing is widely affirmed to be an important element of undergraduate nursing curricula (Hawks et al., 2016) for several compelling reasons. First, writing is understood to be a means of teaching critical thinking skills (Naber & Wyatt, 2014) and to deepen understanding of nursing course content (Oermann, 2023). Second, scholarly writing supports clinical practice to ensure clear concise communication of patient care and treatment is documented (Jefferies et al., 2018). Clear documentation improves patient outcomes but also protects nurses (Jefferies et al., 2010). Third, reflective practice, an important professional skill for nurses, is also supported by writing: reflective writing has been shown to help students understand negative or challenging experiences, create self-awareness, and increase students' self-esteem (Bjerkvik & Hilli, 2019). Furthermore, nursing students need strong writing and communication skills to advance in the nursing profession. Therefore, writing for the purpose of advocacy, research, and representation are key reasons for embedding academic literacy and writing skills in the curriculum (Garvey et al., 2023; Hawks et al., 2016).

As an overall observation on the role of writing in nursing curriculum, Jefferies et al. (2010) assert:

> Written communication provides a much wider platform for the storage of knowledge because the work of memory and conservation is inherent in the written word. It provides nursing with a much greater repository of knowledge and enables the nurse to consider a far greater number of options when making a decision about the patient's condition or their care. (p. 213)

Despite its acknowledged importance in nursing practice, the implementation of writing in the undergraduate nursing curriculum is not always straightforward.

Push and Pull Factors on Writing in the Nursing Curriculum

Institutional policy in this study's setting supports the notion of Writing Across the Curriculum. However, the "policy" is limited to a single paragraph in the academic calendar and provides only vague guidance to instructors or students.

> The University supports the belief that throughout their University careers, students should be taught how to write well so that when they graduate their writing abilities will be far above the minimal standards required at entrance. Consistent with this belief, students are expected to do a substantial amount of writing in their University courses and, where "substantial" amounts of writing in courses, and instructors "where appropriate", "can" and "should" utilize writing as "a factor" in the assessment of student work. Benchmarking of writing standards is equally ill-defined: students' writing abilities are expected to be "far above" those which they possessed at the commencement of their program of study.

In the absence of clearly delineated policy or demonstrable benchmarking, instructors may look to a variety of sources to interpret how writing "can" and "should" be implemented in assessing student work. Faculty may turn, for example, to: writing assignments in previous course syllabi, writing requirements from other institutions, lists of writing requirements in professional competency frameworks, personal beliefs about the efficacy of writing for student learning, student feedback on previous writing assignments, their like or dislike of grading written work, advice and guidance of trusted colleagues, what they themselves experienced as writing assignments when they were students, and many other sources. The typical lack of a clear model or framework for writing instruction within the nursing curriculum (Hawks et al., 2016) does little to provide clarity.

Research literature on the teaching of writing in the nursing curriculum is often classified under three streams: Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), Writing to Learn (WTL), and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) (Troxler et al., 2011). WAC in postsecondary education arose from a belief that the teaching and evaluation of writing was not the sole responsibility of a language department per se, but a duty of instructors in all subject areas (Luthy et al., 2009). WTL refers to the practice of bringing freewriting, journaling, and similar reflective writing practices to other fields of study, to facilitate student reflection and learning (Melzer, 2014). WID focuses on preparing students to write for the discourse communities of their specific discipline (Bazerman & Paradis, 1991). The paraphrased comments in the introduction reflect elements of all three perspectives. A nurse educator who perceives their role primarily as preparing undergraduates for future clinical practice may de-emphasize WID scholarly papers, focusing more on WTL reflections on clinical experiences. In contrast, instructors of particular content areas, such as nursing theory, may structure course writing assignments with a clear WID focus. As will be discussed later, the researchers observed a form of writing instruction in our curriculum not completely encapsulated by any of these three classifications and so propose an umbrella descriptor: Learning to Write by Writing (LWW).

Another pull may be a "hidden curricula" at work in undergraduate nursing education, where the humanistic orientation of the nursing profession may indirectly discourage the use of the seemingly more "objective" focus of technical academic writing (Ahmed & El Hassan, 2023). This tension in nursing curricula between the "biomedical driven objectivism in academic writing" and the explicitly taught "relational, emotional, aesthetic values, and ways of knowing" may then be experienced by students, who learn implicitly from the hidden curriculum the "privileging of the biomedical-technical over the relational-holistic" (Mitchell et al., 2021, p. 2). However, shying away from academic writing, including its use of biomedical language and technical aspects of writing, may actually hamper nursing identity formation (Mitchell et al., 2020). A nursing instructor preparing writing tasks to assess students' learning will likely experience, consciously or unconsciously, this tension.

Setting of this Study

Our undergraduate, English-medium nursing program occurs in a Canadian transnational branch campus in a Gulf Cooperation Council nation. The institution offers a single faculty four-year Bachelor of Nursing (BN) program. Curriculum design, development, and implementation in undergraduate nursing education is context specific, and requires adaptive responses to the social, environmental, health, educational and professional entities it serves (Jager et al., 2020). This illustrates the underrecognized and incredible complexity of the registered nurse role and the depth and breadth of disciplinary knowledge required to prepare students for it. Benner et al. (2010) speak of nursing as a hybrid of many central attributes of other professions, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of nursing as a discipline. As such, nursing education and practice must embrace and advocate for transformative approaches that recognize the holistic nature of patient care, the integration of theory and practice, and the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration to align with rapid changes in practice.

Our nursing program is comprised of students (majority female) who are mostly ELL with numerous mother tongues (including Tagalog, Malayalam, Arabic, and others) who grew up and attended secondary school in the Gulf region. The nursing program has addressed the multi-faceted requirements of undergraduate nursing education by shifting from a traditional nursing curriculum to an original concept and competency-based curriculum. This shift, having begun in 2019 with implementation in 2020, was a move from the traditional siloing of nursing courses which may limit the development of clinical reasoning and judgement. A concept and competency-based curriculum allows for a deeper understanding of fundamental knowledge, creates opportunities to transfer skills across various contexts and settings, and reduces the recurrence of excessive content (Repsha et al., 2020). While developing and implementing the new curriculum, great care was taken to sequence and scaffold theory, lab, and clinical concepts across all four years. The curriculum begins with a focus on health and wellness and continues through the injury, illness, and disease trajectory. Constructivist and experiential teaching and learning are incorporated to facilitate critical thinking, clinical judgment, and decision-making to prepare graduates to address complex health issues in

constantly evolving and chaotic healthcare environments. In essence, a curriculum was created by which faculty knew what to teach and how to teach it.

In the new curriculum, writing was intentionally framed in the following ways: WAC serves as an overarching framework and LTW (direct explicit instruction in academic and disciplinary genres) is delivered in two courses, taken by students during the first year. The first course introduces academic writing from the genres of narrative, critical, and essay writing including how to cite sources, develop arguments, and read critically. The second course builds on the first to include specific disciplinary writing, incorporating academic and information literacy, conventions, style, research, and evidence. In subsequent semesters, the approach to writing is best described as WTL. WTL tasks of various types are assigned as components of course grades. Students receive feedback on the content of their writing, as well as the writing itself (with variance dependent on individual instructors), with writing task complexity increasing throughout the four-year program.

The aim of this paper is to describe the process undertaken by the research team to understand the role and place of writing in the institution's undergraduate nursing curriculum, to report on the findings of our inquiry, and to reflect upon the wider implications of these findings.

Methods

The researchers—a senior nursing instructor, a writing specialist, and a teaching and learning specialist—were tasked by an academic committee to consider the role of writing in the undergraduate nursing curriculum. We set a target for completing our analysis within a semester and met weekly over 10 weeks. The team began by assembling all previous course outlines, for all four years of the undergraduate program. The first preliminary task was to determine inclusion and exclusion criteria. For example, group oral presentations, with accompanying presentation slides, were a means of assessment common to multiple courses. Would the presentation slides therefore be considered "writing" in our analysis?

The research team came to an interpretive consensus that a learning task would be considered a writing assignment for the purposes of analysis if: a) the assignment's *grade* counted toward the final mark for the course and b) the assignment's *description* indicated that writing made up a portion of the assignment grade. For example, if a group oral presentation on a research topic called for presentation slides to be included but did not explicitly specify whether the slides would be part of the assignment grade, we excluded the presentation from analysis. Conversely, we included those group oral presentations that explicitly noted that the slides would be graded for content, adherence to referencing style, etc.

In our view, this is an important distinction to highlight in our analysis, in that expectations for academic writing may actually be layered in an assignment that appears to focus exclusively on oral skills (see Table 1). Ironically, this layering of technical writing within a seemingly more informal

assessment of learning may, knowingly or unknowingly, reinforce the hidden curriculum with its preferential hierarchy of technical writing over more humanistic elements of the nursing curriculum.

Table 1. Selected "Hidden" Writing Requirements Embedded in Oral Tasks

Task	Type of task	"Hidden" Graded Writing Requirements
Group presentation with PowerPoint slides for presentation	Visual summary with accompanying written statement	Slides are graded for APA, grammar, and correct referencing, including in-text citations. Multiple relevant sources are required and must be properly cited.
Concept map	Visual summary with accompanying written statement	Maps are graded for inclusion of relevant resources and proper citation. Proper grammar, spelling, and fluency of language are also graded.

The team began the data collection process with the creation of a spreadsheet (see Table 2) with the following headings:

- Writing Learning Task (WLT);
- Course Type (whether the WLT occurred in a Theory, Lab, or Clinical course);
- Weight of the WLT in the overall grade of the course;
- Weight of all WLTs in the overall grade of the course;
- Type of WLT (e.g., guided reflection; scholarly paper; reflective report)
- Word Count requirement of the WLT
- Relative Difficulty of the WLT (labelled by the research team as *Introduced*, *Developing,* or *Advanced*, compared to the progression of difficulty in the overall degree program (Harden, 2001; Li-Sauerwine & King, 2019); and,
- Bloom's Taxonomy (assigned by the research team as either *Remember*, *Understand*, *Apply*, *Analyse*, *Evaluate*, *Create*) (Marzano & Kendall, 2008).

Table 2. Selected Examples: Writing Learning Task Data Collection

Course	Semester (Year / Term)	WLT	Course type	Weight	Weight (all WLTs)	WLT type	Word count	Relative difficulty	Bloom's Taxonomy
NURS2XX	Y1/T1	Reflection	Theory	20%	60%	guided reflection	500	Introduced	Understand
NURS3XX	Y2/T1	Clinical practice evaluation tool	Clinical	100%	400%	goal setting exercise	100	Introduced	Understand
NURS3XX	Y2/T2	Research critique	Theory	30%	60%	guided critique	750	Introduced	Evaluate
NURS4XX	Y3/T1	Daily clinical worksheet	Clinical	100%	400%	guided reporting	500	Developing	Apply
NURS4XX	Y3/T2	Scholarly paper	Theory	25%	50%	critical analysis	1000	Advanced	Evaluate
NURS5XX	Y4/T1	Annotated bibliography	Theory	30%	80%	annotated bibliography	1000	Advanced	Analyse
NURS5XX	Y4/T1	Practice Formative Feedback Tool	Clinical	100%	400%	reflective report	not given	Advanced	Evaluate

There are at least two potential limitations to this study. First, the researchers drew exclusively upon written descriptions of WLTs in course outlines. While a review of syllabus content is a useful method of understanding the role of writing across a curriculum, the syllabus ultimately presents an incomplete picture of how course material is actually delivered by instructors (Stanny et al., 2015). Further research into instructor perspectives and classroom practices would supplement the findings presented here.

Second, the categorization of relative difficulty and levels of Bloom's Taxonomy were assigned by the researchers. We acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of this process. However, the research team has considerable expertise in curriculum design, scaffolding, and assessment. Furthermore, the researchers followed principles of interpretive consensus (Rodham et al., 2015) while assigning relative difficulty to writing tasks.

Results

Table 3 illustrates the amount of writing required, on average across the curriculum, and the relative weight of writing within the total graded components of the course.

Table 3. Word Requirements and Relative Weight of Writing as a Percentage of Course Total Grade

	Year	Number of WLTs	Word count requirement specified (%)	Average word requirement	Average weight (all WLTs) (%)*
	1	18	33%	567	53%
	2	22	55%	508	34%
	3	26	54%	718	51%
	4	11	45%	630	63%
Average		**19**	**47%**	**606**	**50%**

*Weights of writing in clinical courses are omitted from calculations (see explanation in the footnote of Table 2 - footnote 3).

Figure 1 presents the writing requirements according to the type of course. As might be expected, nursing theory and elective courses require the largest number of writing tasks; however, we find it notable that even courses heavily oriented to nursing practice (clinical and lab) also utilize writing as a means of assessing students' learning.

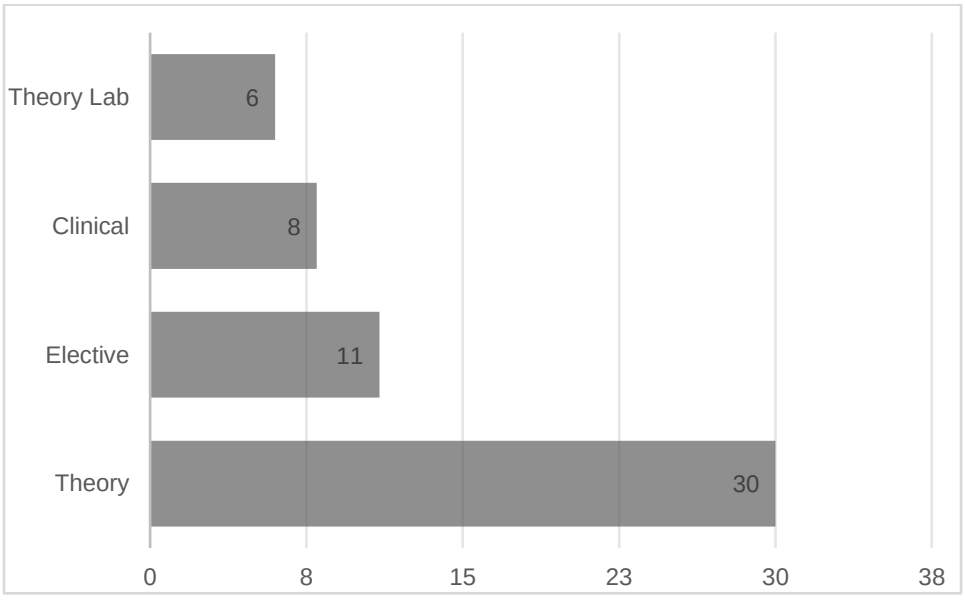

Figure 1: Writing Learning Tasks by Course Type

In Figures 2 and 3, we observe the progression, over program duration, of the relative difficulty of WLTs. Figure 2 illustrates, by cohort year, the percentage of writing assignments that are

considered *Introduced*, *Developing*, or *Advanced* relative to other WLTs across the program. It can be seen that *Introduced* dominates writing tasks in Year 1, then gives way to *Advanced* concepts by Year 4. Similarly, Figure 3 shows how lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy are represented in writing tasks from the earlier years of the program, while evidence of higher-order learning *(Create, Evaluate, Analyse*) features in the writing assessments from the upper years. As will be discussed further in the Discussion section, this scaffolded progression of relative difficulty seems to have occurred independently from the processes of deliberate, centralized curriculum planning.

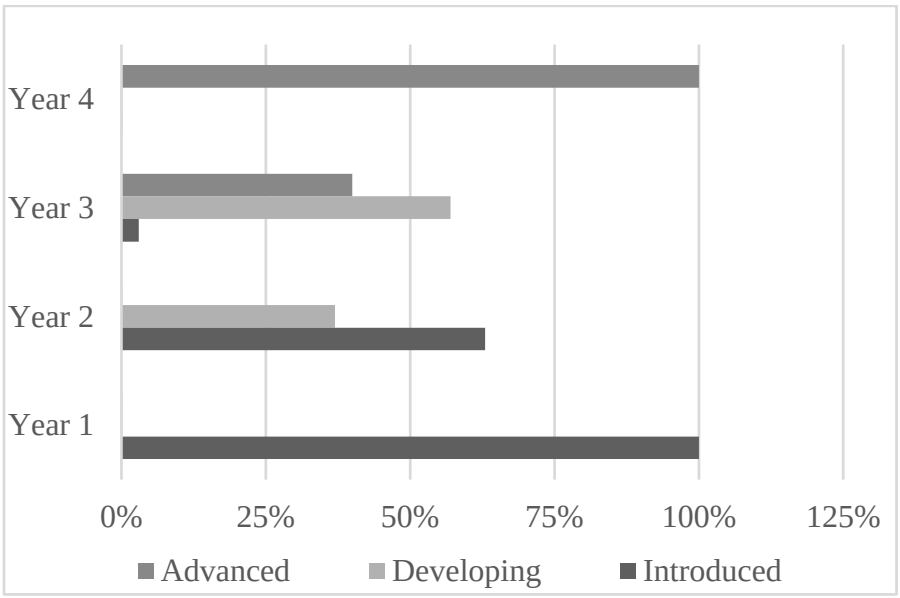

Figure 2: Relative Difficulty of Writing Learning Tasks by Cohort (%)

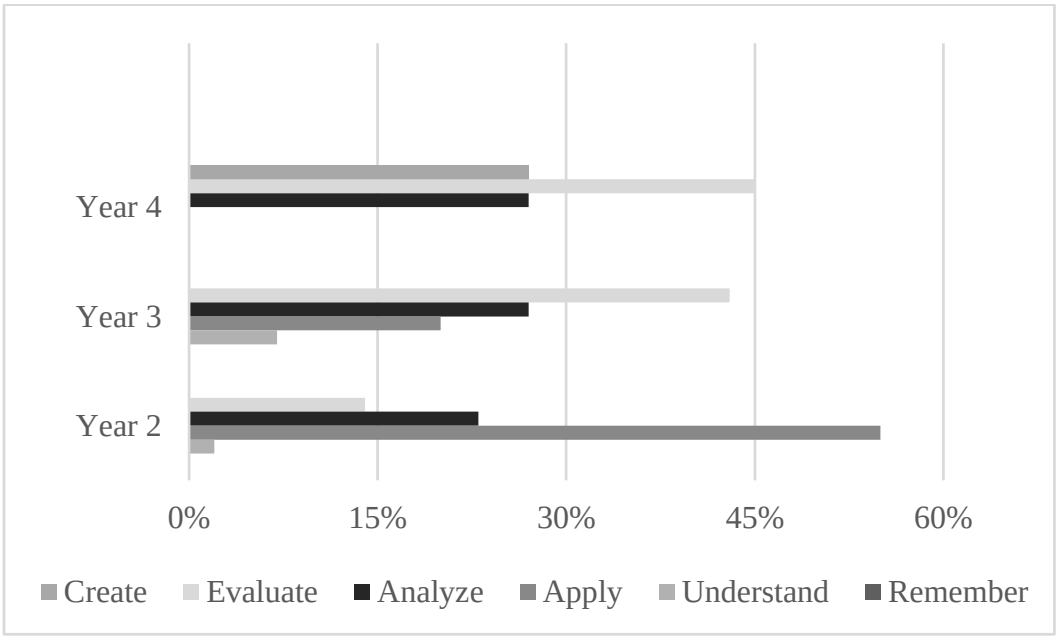

Figure 3: Progression of Writing Learning Tasks Assessed by Bloom's Taxonomy, by Cohort (%)

Finally, we note that in analysing the raw number of each type of writing assignment across the undergraduate curriculum, the largest type by far was those WLTs considered reflective in nature (see Figure 4).

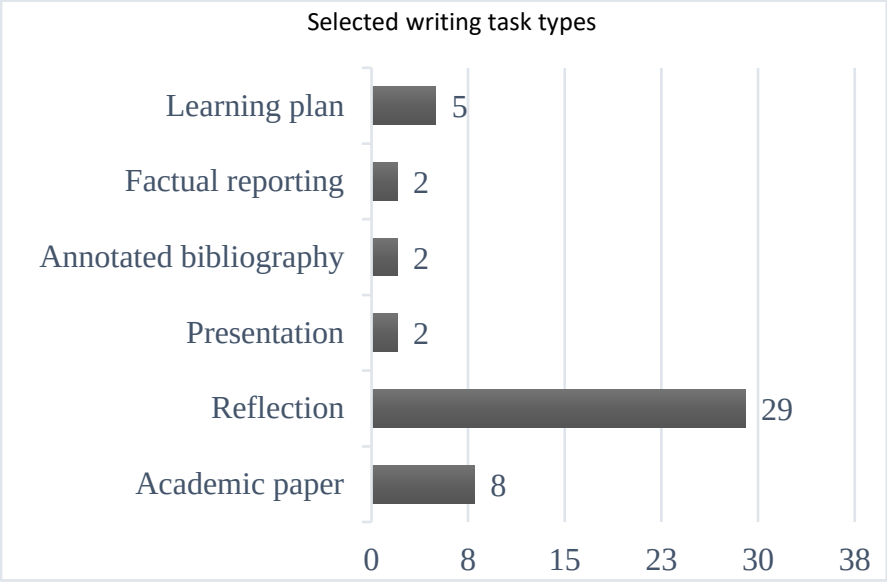

Figure 4: Writing Learning Task Types

Discussion and Recommendations

In considering the results of the data collection and analysis in light of the research questions, several observations became prominent. We present these here as findings, as iterative reflections for our own syllabus planning, and as recommendations for readers to consider as they evaluate WAC in their own settings.

Types and Amount of Writing

To begin with, the data analysis highlighted a larger than anticipated amount of writing being done in our curriculum, underscored by a surprising (at least to us) amount of writing required in clinical documents and reflections. However, post-presentation discussion with faculty revealed a belief that if a written learning task was not a scholarly paper, as prevalent in theory and elective courses, it did not constitute "writing", perhaps affirming the observation of Mitchell et al. (2021) regarding a hidden curriculum of the "objective" and technical over the humanistic. Countering this, however, was the observation that when sheer numbers of writing assignments are considered across the curriculum, reflective writing far outnumbers any other type. While these may be called different names by instructors (e.g., guided reflection, reflective report) the task description in the course outline indicates a reflective orientation, focused on reviewing experience to positively inform future practice (Bulman et al., 2012). The apparent disconnect between faculty views of "real" writing as academic research papers accompanied by a heavy use of reflective writing in actual teaching practice, warrants further study.

Scaffolded Curriculum

The researchers were also pleasantly surprised to see that, by and large, the curriculum indicated a general progression of WLTs, from *Introduced* in the early courses of the curriculum, to *Developing* and *Advanced* in the upper years. Similarly, WLTs categorized as reflecting the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (*Remember*, *Understand*) generally occurred at the beginning of the program, while higher order levels like *Evaluate* and *Create* were by and large reserved for the upper year courses. This progression is particularly noteworthy in that when undertaking the shift to a concept-based curriculum, no deliberate attention was paid by the curriculum designers to scaffolding the sequence of the writing tasks from lower to upper years, neither in terms of relative difficulty nor by elements of Bloom's Taxonomy. Interestingly, this scaffolding seemingly happened independently of deliberate, centralized, "top-down" design and planning. This may well highlight the benefits of "bottom-up" curriculum design (Cummings et al., 2005) where individual instructors recognize, embody, and enact the role of a particular course within the larger curriculum, identify the current knowledge base of their students, and then sequence learning tasks accordingly.

Learning to Write by Writing (LWW)

As acknowledged previously, the institution's curriculum reflects elements of WAC, WTL, and WID. Yet, through an iterative, reflective process in the data collection and analysis for this study, the researchers observed that how writing is actually presented, taught, and learned in our curriculum is not fully encompassed by any of these three categories. We propose an overarching, umbrella descriptor, Learning to Write by Writing (LWW), which in our view more aptly characterizes the process. We understand LWW to be a continuous, spiralling, but non-linear, feedback loop, ever-increasing in complexity; student writers absorb elements of writing (such as cohesion and coherence, style and mechanics, grammar and vocabulary, audience and purpose, conventions and genres) through both explicit and implied means. Also important to LWW is the (often indirect) input that writers absorb through reading and observing in the discipline, and through the nursing community of practice.

The following example, while fictitious, has been observed regularly by all three researchers in their observations of how students' writing process is enacted in our institution. Rawan is a hypothetical second-year undergraduate nursing student. Like much of the multilingual student body in this transnational branch campus, Rawan self-identifies English as her additional, rather than her first, language. A course in which she is enrolled requires her to submit a guided critique of research literature, a "genre" (Hyland, 2007) of writing task with which she is entirely unfamiliar. Rawan begins by clarifying potential topics with her instructor, then follows up by querying her friend, a third-year student who previously completed a similar assignment, on prospective strategies. She draws upon Google searches for similar writing assignments and uses ChatGPT-3.5 for ideas around the structure and cohesion of research critiques. She also reviews the institution's Learning Commons guides to find information or a template that fits the assignment. She selects and reads

several peer-reviewed articles for her research critique while making mental notes about the structure and word choices of academic writing. Rawan then makes an appointment at the institution's Writing Centre to consult with a Writing Specialist about the assignment description and rubric and to receive input on help crafting an outline. She is now ready to begin the research and writing process and draws upon the automated feedback from Grammarly and Microsoft Word to revise her English usage.

After a draft is completed, Rawan makes another appointment with the Writing Specialist, who makes suggestions—with detailed rationale—on a range of issues regarding cohesion, coherence, clarity of argument, mechanics of usage, matters of APA referencing, and alignment with the grading rubric. The Writing Centre at our university (at the time of writing) is staffed by two Writing Specialists. Both Writing Specialists are experienced teachers with an M.Ed specializing in writing and English language instruction and have extensive experience working with EAL students in multiple post-secondary institutions in the Middle East and Asia.

While making the suggested revisions, Rawan continues ongoing discussions with classmates who are also completing this learning task, and they share strategies and approaches. Rawan may also make an appointment with the instructor during the regularly scheduled office hours and receive the instructor's on-the-spot feedback regarding several aspects of her draft, which Rawan takes on board, before another visit to the Writing Specialist for concluding feedback regarding adherence to the rubric, APA formatting, and clarity of thought. Following the submission of the final version of her learning task to the instructor, Rawan receives a grade referencing the rubric, along with the instructor's written feedback.

Starting from virtually no knowledge of this type of writing task, Rawan has Learned to Write by Writing: a non-linear process of composing, drafting, receiving and taking onboard feedback from multiple human and machine sources, reading in the genre of the writing task, and then composing some more. Rawan will repeat this LWW process in sub-genres of writing new to her, with increasing task complexity, throughout her four-year degree program.

Faculty and Student Writing Support

The important role of Writing Centres in providing student access to the multiliteracies of higher education is well established (Clarence & Dison, 2017), having been shown to assist in multiple aspects of student benefits such as improved grades (Tiruchittampalam et al., 2018), enhanced motivation (Nordlof, 2014), increased self-efficacy as writers (Babcock & Thonus, 2018), and inculcation of higher order elements of writing (Henson & Stephenson, 2009), among others (Pleasant et al., 2016). However, much less is understood about the role of Writing Centres in providing direct support for *faculty*. Our iterative reflections on the data and subsequent discussions with faculty underscored the critical role, consistently enacted in actual process, that the Writing Centre plays in our institution, not just in assisting students through the LWW process, but supporting faculty in the teaching and assessment of WAC as well. It is not uncommon for nursing

educators, though experts in nursing content areas, to point out that they are "not writing teachers" which may, at times, express an underlying internal conflict about their own self-efficacy as writers, and/or the role of writing in the nursing profession (Mitchell, 2018).

The importance of collaboration between Writing Centres and faculty is well established (Mckay & Simpson, 2013). However, our findings point beyond collaboration to the importance of Writing Centres in offering direct support to faculty in their work as writers. The Writing Centre in our context, despite its primary mission as student success, directly assists *faculty* writing in several critical (if underrecognized) ways. The Writing Centre receives appointments from faculty looking for assistance in constructing effective rubrics to assess student writing and is asked to conduct faculty workshops on rubric design, a Writing Centre function which we recognize may be atypical in that a single faculty institution lends itself to enhanced access to writing support services. Instructors seek the Writing Centre's feedback on academic papers faculty intend to submit for publication and may be invited to participate as co-authors; their role in identifying and utilizing discipline-specific written expression is highly valued. Course syllabi and institutional policy documents are often reviewed and proofread by the Writing Centre team for clarity of expression and grammatical and lexical accuracy. Instructors regularly initiate consultations with Writing Centre staff regarding written assignments and their grading, as well as issues of academic integrity such as APA referencing, plagiarism, and the ethical use of generative software tools in student writing. The Writing Centre team regularly provides their disciplinary expertise to the institution as members of various curriculum and program committees.

In sum, it is evident that the Writing Centre in the setting of this study plays a central role in supporting WAC, WTL, WID, and LWW for *both* students *and* faculty. We assert that nursing education as a whole would benefit from further research into ways Writing Centres build student and faculty capacity.

Conclusion

The importance of writing in undergraduate nursing programs has been highlighted throughout this article and broader academic research. The significance of how much writing, where writing occurs, and how it is taught in the curriculum led the authors of this paper to many discoveries that we encourage other nursing programs to enact. Reviewing the amount of writing assignments and instruction of how to write clearly demonstrated to us that learning to write in our undergraduate curriculum is accomplished primarily by writing: Learning to Write by Writing. This process also revealed how writing was scaffolded across the curriculum, the varying types of writing tasks, and the sheer volume of writing assignments required. This transformative experience fed back positively to the continual appraisal process of written assessment strategies, giving a much better understanding of the volume and types of writing required in theory, lab, and clinical courses. However, this discovery process raised for us an important question: if indeed students are primarily

learning to write by writing, do they have sufficient support to do so? In this regard, the critical role of writing centres and writing support faculty was underscored.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank Dr. Zohra Hasnani-Samnani for challenging, inspiring, and encouraging us to share the findings of our data collection with the broader community of nurse educators. We are also grateful to Sumayya Ansar for her timely and helpful assistance with our research, and to Daniel Forgrave for his constructive feedback in improving the manuscript; their guidance provides further compelling evidence that collaboration and support from librarians and Writing Centre specialists undergird the work of faculty as writers. Finally, thank you to Morwena June De Guzman for going above and beyond to help with formatting.

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Starting and Sustaining Writing Centers in Lebanese Schools

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of a project initiated in 2016 that aimed to introduce school writing centers in Lebanon. A review of the literature at the time reflected an urgent need for pre-university writing support systems. The spread of school writing centers stemmed from the growth of a leading university writing center in Lebanon. The project spanned over 3 years and covered theoretical and practical components, with 20 schools, represented by 52 teachers, and three universities, represented by five faculty members, attending the sessions. As a result, six schools launched their own writing centers, adopting their own vision to cater to their diverse student populations. In 2018, a progress assessment was performed with the school directors, and in 2021, a questionnaire was shared with the same group to trace their long-term accomplishments and challenges. Findings showed the project not only met its aims, but also exceeded expectations, as schools across Lebanon established successful writing centers. Although the American model of university writing centers inspired the project, it was reshaped to serve the needs of ESL/EFL students. In future initiatives, it will be important to consider certain fiscal and administrative restrictions that some schools, especially public ones, might encounter.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, writing centers have gained prominence in colleges and universities worldwide due to their vital role in helping students develop critical thinking and writing skills, thereby enabling them to become more effective global citizens. The Writing Center Directory documents the presence of writing centers in 54 countries worldwide (https://web.stcloudstate.edu/writeplace/wcd/index.html). Similarly, the Middle East and North Africa Writing Centers Alliance (MENAWCA) website, at one time, featured a comparable list of writing centers that began to emerge at MENA universities in the early years of this century (Hodges et al., 2019). Despite the expansion of university writing centers in the MENA region, school-based writing centers had not yet been established. This spurred efforts to establish school writing centers and secure their place on the MENA writing center landscape. Given the success of university writing centers in Lebanon, the need to extend similar support to schools became increasingly evident.

A study conducted by Esseili (2014) identifies several challenges faced by language curricula in private and public schools in Lebanon, challenges that could potentially be alleviated by the introduction of school writing centers. The major issues experienced in both sectors are evident in the diverse backgrounds of faculty members, the selection of textbooks–whether imported or government-issued–and the emphasis on varying language skills (Esseili, 2014). Private school teachers specifically identified the development of students' writing skills as a major problem. They believed that the lack of focus on grammar was a concern, stemming from the expectation that students learn it deductively while writing, a concern also raised by public school teachers, especially at the lower grade levels. Esseili (2014) further reports that a higher percentage of class time was spent on reading comprehension of texts with difficult vocabulary, and this reduced the amount of time spent on

developing writing strategies and writing processes. Class sizes, which ranged between 35 and 40 students, was another challenge that prevented teachers from giving individual attention to their learners. Another concern was raised by Jarkas and Fakhreddine (2017), who observed that incoming university students struggled to develop their own authorial voices, a difficulty that may be linked to the approaches used to teach writing in schools. This picture confirmed the needs of school students for writing support services such as writing centers.

After 5 years of successful operation, an English-medium university writing center in Lebanon sought to expand its services by launching a national initiative to encourage not only institutions of higher learning but also high schools to establish their own writing centers. The university writing center, therefore, developed a plan for working with schools to introduce writing centers. The key objective of the project was to train potential tutors in an initial three-day retreat before the beginning of the academic year. Follow-up sessions were then recommended to support newly appointed directors and tutors in managing their own school writing centers. The training was led by the director of the lead university's writing center, along with trained tutors who shared practical and innovative strategies during a series of workshops, followed by on-site visits to participating schools. Additionally, a special guest speaker was invited to the university's New York office to share her expertise via videoconferencing. The funding for this initiative was secured through a grant proposal titled 'Spreading Writing Center Pedagogy & Practice,' which was submitted by the Writing Center Director to the U.S. Embassy in Beirut. These funds were to be used to train representatives from other universities and schools to help them establish their own writing centers, organize them, manage their records and train their selected teachers to run them. The proposal was accepted, and the Small English Language Grant was received in 2016. The long-term vision behind this initiative was to assist feeder schools in promoting a culture of writing among their students, who, as non-native English speakers, would be better prepared for the language demands of university, specifically in academic writing. Eventually, these high school graduates would apply their acquired writing skills to succeed in any career they pursue.

Review of the Literature

The History of Writing Centers in the U.S. and Beyond

The 2024 European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) Conference in Limerick, Ireland celebrated 40 years of Stephen North's (1984) "Idea of a Writing Center," a seminal article that marked the shift from the therapeutic writing clinics or labs to the supportive writing center spaces where student writers are coached rather than corrected. The conference theme revolved around the future of writing centers and invited participants to reimagine it. While reflecting upon the future, reference to history is essential on the transnational and regional levels. In the early 1960s and early 1970s, writing centers proliferated widely throughout American universities and became a common element of student support services on U.S. college campuses (North, 1984). Due to their growing presence, the National Writing Centers Association (NWCA), an affiliate of the National

Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), was founded in 1983 as a platform specifically for writing center professionals. It initially operated solely at the national level in the United States but later expanded to include writing centers in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. These regional groups eventually became affiliates including EWCA and MENAWCA. The expansion of writing centers beyond the U.S. necessitated a change of name in 1998, from "National" to "International Writing Centers Association" (International Writing Centers Association, n.d.-a). In 1987, the NCTE, during its Annual Business Meeting, recognized the important contribution writing centers have made to student success at all levels of education. It currently has four affiliated regional writing center associations outside of the US, including MENAWCA, which was established in 2007 (International Writing Centers Association, n.d.-b). This international expansion further enhanced the association's value and illuminated the value of writing centers worldwide.

The Multilevel Value of Writing Centers

Several educators have highlighted the value of writing centers at different developmental levels. Childers et al. (2004) demonstrate how student writers, tutors and schools can profit from writing centers. These centers can also boost students' self-confidence, an aspect that Thonhauser (2000) found lacking in the writing of Lebanese students, especially when engaging in independent writing tasks. As cited by Honein-Shehadi (2007), writing centers can also improve student writing skills and help them become better readers. According to Childers et al. (2004), the benefits are not only academic but psychological as well. Furthermore, Harris (1992) highlights the social value of writing centers, where students need not feel alone, as their ideas are shared in a welcoming space free from judgement based on grades, as is often the case with their teachers. With the recognition of the various benefits of writing centers, secondary school writing centers were launched in the 1970s in the U.S. even though they were initially established to cater to college level students (Fels & Wells, 2011). In the MENA region, according to Honein-Shehadi (2007), the Middle East has seen the establishment of writing centers mostly at the university level with notable examples including the American University of Beirut (AUB), the American University of Cairo (AUC), institutions in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Oman, and five universities in Qatar.

Adaptation of Writing Center Practices to Local Contexts

Hodges et al. (2019) recognize how U.S. writing center models have been helpful for MENA writing center practitioners but emphasize the importance of adapting to the unique context of MENA writing centers to effectively serve the diverse tutor and writer populations at international branch campuses, such as those in Education City, Qatar. They also emphasize that secondary education in the region is heterogeneous, so the writing center pedagogy ought to be reworked continually. In that respect, Schiera (2020), in his review of tutor training material in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), strongly recommends adapting Western writing center practices to better suit local needs. In 2010, the Lebanese American University (LAU) responded to the growing need to improve students' writing across the curriculum, as identified in its 2007 Institutional Self-Study, which highlighted writing as an area requiring urgent attention (p. 51). In the case of LAU and several other

institutions, writing centers have proven to be effective in enhancing students' academic writing, positioning these universities as stronger candidates for accreditation. Since institutions with writing centers may achieve full accreditation more efficiently, universities may be motivated to adopt such innovative strategies to strengthen students' English language skills. Whether to pursue accreditation or to benefit from the writing center model itself, several universities in the Middle East, particularly in Lebanon, established writing centers based on the American model. However, the concept remained uncommon in secondary schools. Once the value of writing centers was established at the university level, their potential impact in schools–the driving force behind this project–became clear and compelling.

The Value of Writing Centers for Schools

Several authors have emphasized the value of writing centers in schools specifically. Levin (1989) contends that writing centers ought to live up to their name, "making writing central in the school and in students' lives by involving students and adults in a collaborative approach to writing and encouraging a positive attitude towards it" (Tobin, 2010, p. 230). Tobin (2010) illustrates this through a case study demonstrating how writing centers can play a vital role in assisting students, faculty and schools to better prepare them for college performance and vocational success. Fels and Wells (2011) describe secondary school writing centers as a place to build both competency and confidence in writing. Since no grades are attached, the focus shifts to the process, not the product itself. In addition to supporting student writers, peer tutors are beneficiaries as well, for they gain reading and listening skills while the tutoring experience contributes to the improvement of their own writing.

Honein-Shehadi (2007) observes that although secondary school writing centers were not widely or officially established at the time, some of the more visible examples existed in countries such as Denmark, Germany, Azerbaijan. However, few were documented in the MENA region. According to the Writing Centers Roots Project compiled by Mendelsohn and funded by International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) in 2018, 65 college/university writing centers existed in the MENA region but only five school writing centers were listed. Realizing that few researchers have investigated secondary school students' writing needs both in Lebanon and abroad, Honein-Shehadi embarked on investigating the writing needs in Lebanese secondary schools. She notes that educators in colleges tend to criticize students' writing weaknesses, so this alone may be an indicator of the need to better prepare students for the challenges of university writing, and to provide them with the fundamental skills in secondary schools. She proposes that writing centers can be part of the solution to those needs. To assess the needs, a questionnaire designed by Honein-Shehadi was administered to 76 teachers from four secondary schools in the Greater Beirut area in Lebanon. Results of the study indicated that 92% of the teachers surveyed perceived a need among their students for extra assistance and support in their written assignments, and 90% of the teachers favored the establishment of a writing center in their school to provide guidance for their students in any language. The overall results of the survey were encouraging, as Lebanon seemed to offer a

unique setting in which secondary school writing centers could flourish as reflected in most of the teachers' responses. Honein-Shehadi also notes that once a school adopts the idea of a writing center and promotes it, it may encourage others to follow suit. Honein-Shehadi's thesis, which was funded by an IWCA grant, is the only documentation of the readiness for having writing centers in Lebanese schools, so it could serve as a needs analysis source and was an appropriate reference prior to the schools' project. The focus shifts to the future potential of writing centers after examining their current status in Lebanese schools. Esseili's (2014) findings correlate with Honein-Shehadi's which further confirms the need for introducing writing centers into schools.

Project Aim and Objectives

The aim of the project was to share the experience of an English-medium university's writing center in supporting students' academic writing across disciplines. This project aimed at spreading awareness about the value of the one-on-one experience with a tutor and its positive impact on students' writing skills in all subject matters, ultimately contributing to their future career success. The vision revolved around the idea that if the same student support service is widely offered in other universities and schools, a ripple effect could enhance student success nationally. Schools could emulate the university writing center experience and adapt it to their assignments such as MUN position papers, university application bios, and mini-research papers for different subjects. Thus, the concept of writing centers–as opposed to writing labs or remedial programs solely for struggling students–was introduced with the hope that it would spread as a resource for students of all language abilities at both the college and school levels, including the gifted, the creative, and those facing challenges. Furthermore, the trained peer-tutors from schools would not only join universities cognizant of what writing centers can offer but might consider becoming peer tutors at the university level as well. Whether students tutor as part of financial aid work, for their CV enrichment, or as an internship, the benefits extend across academic, professional, and workplace contexts.

Project Implementation

Phase 1 - School Recruitment, Training Methods, and Workshop Assessment

The project covered several phases after the completion of school recruitment, which was done through letters of invitation to school administrators. Throughout April and May 2016, the university's Writing Center team conducted training sessions on its Beirut campus. Participants attended four weekly, in-person, three-hour interactive sessions. Fifty-two teachers and coordinators represented 20 Lebanese schools, and five faculty members represented three Lebanese universities. After surveying their type of schools, the results indicated that 69.2 percent of the attendees were affiliated with private schools and 69.2 percent had not heard of writing centers prior to joining the series of workshops. One of the participants underscored the potential of writing centers and reflected its novelty in their setting by describing it as "an initiative which [they] feel could greatly modify the perception of writing. The idea was quite new to [their] community."

Participants were initially given seminal articles to read from the literature of writing centers in the U.S. in addition to a list of references of online resources and books representing the field of writing centers as a supportive concept. Then, over multiple sessions, the same university's writing center experience, with the help of the organizing team, was shared, covering the philosophy of the center, its mission statement, short- and long-term goals, and the resources that were created in it through reading and workshopping. After that, attendees were assisted in writing their own mission statements before submitting them to their school administration. The writing of these statements involved a process where several drafts were revised in response to suggestions from training tutors, emulating a writing center session, before each participant decided on a final version. The participants left with actual content to apply to their institutions, so the workshops had a practical component that built on the theoretical discussion.

A Special Final Session with a School Expert

Ms. Amber Jensen, president of the Capital Area Peer Tutoring Association (CAPTA), secondary school representative of the IWCA Executive Board, and specialist in school writing centers, conducted the last session from the New York campus of the same university via videoconferencing. This innovative approach, especially notable before the rise of virtual work due to Covid, involved Ms. Jensen travelling from Washington, D.C. to New York so her presentation could be broadcast to Beirut where participants convened in one conference room to follow her on a big screen. This final session was a chance for the attendees to learn from the American experience and the challenges that were involved in their establishment in different schools there. During that interactive session, teachers had the chance to voice their specific concerns and ask the expert about the existing scenarios in schools in America. This exchange allowed them to compare the American experience with their settings in different Lebanese schools and contemplate ways of adapting the idea according to the needs and available resources of each school. It is crucial to consider adopting a flexible approach that can serve a specific community or school with the writing center vision in mind, for the one-size-fits all method would contradict the philosophy of writing centers.

To mark the end of the onsite training, on May 6, 2016, a ceremony was held where certificates of attendance were given to each participant who was present during all the sessions. The Cultural Attaché at the American Embassy then, the Cultural Affairs Assistant, the President of the host university, the Dean of the School of Arts & Sciences, and 50 teachers and coordinators attended the ceremony that motivated the participants. The participants left with a sense of accomplishment, and the culminating event gave the organizing Center an institutional recognition and an esteemed external value as well. Teachers in Lebanon rarely have professional development opportunities, so this involvement empowered them in their schools to become decision makers and to advance in their careers.

Social Media Presence

As one of the grant's requirements, from the beginning of the project, a social media platform was specified, namely, a Facebook page was created for the group members to share insights and constantly interact about their centers, and to serve as a virtual space for announcing any upcoming regional and international conferences or activities that are of common interests. The page has reached 225 followers to date (Writing Centers at Schools @writingcentersatschools) and continues to be active for its followers. It also includes photos documenting all the events of the training and other pertinent developments or announcements in the field of writing centers. This page was then used as a platform to announce conferences, among other events; through it, several presented in the MENAWCA biennial conference(s) and connected their peer tutors to CAPTA who in turn, presented in conferences while others learned about IWCA summer institutes for professional development.

Post Workshop Sessions Feedback from Participants

As a preliminary assessment of the workshop series, the workshop organizers asked participants to complete a survey (including an objective and subjective section) anonymously reflecting on the overall experience. Reviewers could form a positive impression of the participants' experience based on the responses. Below are both numerical results of some of the questions and comments that were made by participants. Quantitatively, they can be summarized as follows:

- 43.6 percent strongly agreed that the content of the workshops was appropriate.
- 64.1 percent found the workshop activities stimulating
- 43.2 percent would recommend the workshops to colleagues.
- 28.9 percent felt that the content of the workshops is applicable to their institutions

The overall feedback about the workshops was promising, but the lower percentage related to doubts about the feasibility of the idea of having a writing center in their institutions or schools. Only 28.9 percent felt that the content of the workshops is applicable to their institutions. The value of this percentage could be reflective of one of the challenges.

The subjective section inquired about the most beneficial aspects of the workshop. Most participants indicated that the sessions addressed practical steps for implementing writing centers in high schools. A recurring comment highlighted the benefit of promoting a new school culture centered on writing. Additionally, when asked about aspects of the workshop that could be improved, several attendees expressed the need for more applicable ideas and processes on how to implement this concept at schools in contrast to the way they were adopted in colleges and universities.

In the final question on what topics should be addressed in future workshops; a few concerns were listed regarding the actual implementation of writing centers in schools. The main challenges identified included planning meetings with students during school's rigid schedules, attracting

students to the writing center, managing the distribution of sessions between middle and high school, and training peer tutors. The challenges can be labelled under three categories: management, logistics and implementation.

Phase 2 - Project Extension, Further Onsite Training, and the Ripple Effect

After receiving multiple requests from five schools that had launched their writing centers, a no-cost project extension was granted by the U.S. Embassy. This allowed the team to provide further training and on-site follow-up visits at the start of the new academic year in September. The extension was granted until end of March 2017, which proved beneficial for several schools where further training took place on the premises for teachers, and in some cases peer tutors, too. The geographical areas where the schools were situated ranged from Roumieh, Brummana, and Aley in Mount Lebanon Governorate, Beirut, andto Sidon in South Lebanon Governorate, and those schools benefitted from further training to meet their individual needs. (Figure 1 situates new school writing centers in three different governorates of Lebanon with building icons representing the centers.) The impact of the project was felt nationally, and not just limited to Beirut, the capital, or other major cities. In fact, one of the schools in Sidon officially opened the first high school writing center in May 2017 making history in the South and Lebanon at large. Furthermore, because of this project, the writing center director of the school applied to a similar Small English Language Grant from the U.S. Embassy and was awarded one to support the new writing center and help her establish other writing centers in their sister schools' network.

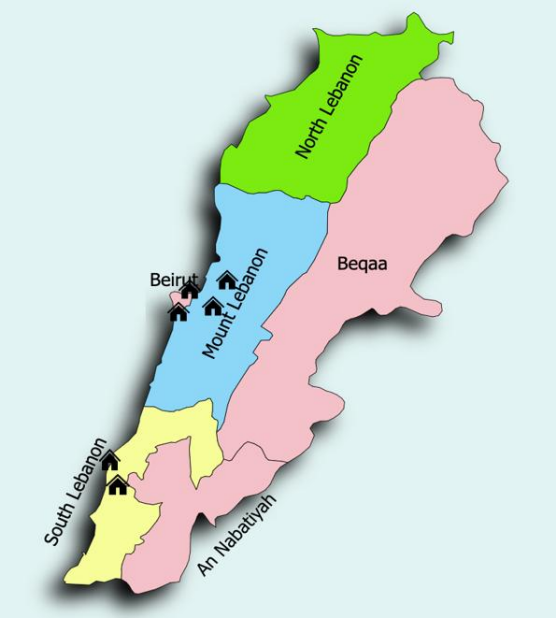

Figure 1: New School Writing Centers in Three Governorates of Lebanon

It is worth noting that this project created opportunities beyond the scope of its original vision. At the university level, one of the workshop participants proposed establishing a writing center at a sister university in Beirut and was awarded a $10,000 grant to do so. That center recently celebrated

its sixth year of operation. Beyond the grant period, a major school network in Beirut independently requested training to establish a writing center at one of its schools, covering the costs from its own budget. This demonstrates the growing ripple effect of the project and the expanding demand for training. Based on what was planned and developed, the project not only met its aims but also exceeded its expectations, to see several schools in and outside Beirut starting and spreading the culture of writing centers.

Unfortunately, some schools were still unable to benefit from the on-site training either because of the security situation in their areas or because of change of administrative leadership in their schools that delayed the opening of their centers. Consequently, a second no-cost extension until mid- August 2017 was granted to be able to complete this mission. Fortunately, several schools in Beirut and Sidon benefitted from that for training both tutors and peer-tutors. The team of the school in Sidon also had the opportunity to visit the host Writing Center to receive further training and observe live tutoring sessions with its students. This was an expansion of the initial methodology which enabled the new school team to observe sessions in a university writing center and to motivate them to adopt some of its methods and procedures. Eventually, the second extension benefitted the second school in Sidon, which became the first to establish a trilingual writing center offering support in English, French, and Arabic.

As a wrap-up session on tutor training, Dr. Amy Zenger, a MENAWCA board member, was invited to talk to all the school officials about her experience with training tutors. She led an interactive session not only about tutoring but also about the challenges that schools could be facing. Additionally, it was an opportunity for the audience to learn about how they could participate in writing center conferences–especially at the regional level–to share their experiences and challenges to date. The recommendation became a reality two years after the new centers began operating. At least three of the newly established writing center directors presented on their respective centers at the 2019 Biennial MENAWCA Conference, held in Beirut and hosted by the same university writing center whose director served on the regional affiliate's board.

Phase 3 – Follow-up with Emerging Directors, Challenges, and Accomplishments

A year after the establishment of four writing centers in different areas, from Sidon to Mount Lebanon, directors were invited to share their experiences in a one-on-one setting with the writing center director who planned the initial project. The main reason was to gauge whether these novice centers were operating smoothly and to understand what their primary obstacles were. Each director responded to a few questions, which focused on the successes as well as the challenges thus far (see Appendix A for all the questions). Their responses reflect several concerns as well as achievements and additions to their initial proposals.

Table 1 shows information about the new writing center directors, who were either full-time instructors of English or language coordinators for Arabic or French at their schools, held credentials in education or linguistics. The years of service spent in the institution ranged from 6 to 25, which reflects their stable belonging and commitment.

Table 1. Writing Center Directors Information

School Location	Language	Position Type	Years in Institution	Degree(s)	Writing Center Responsibilities	Date of Launching of Writing Centers
Sidon, South Lebanon	English	Full-Time Director	18	M.A. in Education (LAU)	Planning workshops and school-wide writing activities and tutoring	December, 2017
	Arabic	Full-Time Coordinator	22	License in Arabic Literature (LU)		
	French	Full-Time Coordinator	25	License in French (LU)		
Sidon, South Lebanon	English	Full-Time Language Coordinator/ Teacher	11	B.A. in English TD (AUB)	Planning workshops, training peer tutors and scheduling visits and tutoring	May, 2017
Aley, Mount Lebanon	English	Full-time Director/Instructor of English	6	B.A. in English, TD, MA Candidate in Linguistics (LU)	Planning activities, training tutors, and keeping visitation data	October, 2016
Broumana, Mount Lebanon	English	Full-time Director/IB Eng. Lit. Teacher and Coordinator	9	M.A. in English (LU)	Keeping records, planning workshops and tutoring	October, 2016

Motivating Factors

The directors' motivations stemmed from both internal and external sources: internal motivation came from the inspiration gained in the workshops and the belief in helping students become autonomous writers as they progress; external motivation was related to the school administration's endorsement of the idea of writing centers. Most directors recognized the added value of writing centers for college preparation and for their school accreditation purposes.

Encountered Constraints: Scheduling, Visibility, and Workload

Although the new directors were highly motivated, they faced several constraints. In many schools, teachers volunteered during their lunch breaks to tutor in the centers, and in some cases, they even offered to help on Saturdays for a couple of hours. While many administrators were concerned about the financial burden, some managed to provide a one-hour release for six faculty advisors, each of whom worked two shifts per week. These challenges can primarily be described as time-related, as finding the right time to meet all students' needs and demands proved difficult.

Another challenge faced by the school writing centers is the struggle for visibility. Although most centers have the necessary resources and can function with just a single computer in some cases, the issue of visibility remains significant. Faculty members, especially those teaching subject-specific courses or from other disciplines, need to be made aware of the value of the service. At the student level, since the concept was newly introduced, various strategies were employed to attract students to use the service. To encourage visits, some schools created video presentations, showed PowerPoint slides to grade 10 students, and even made announcements during parent meetings to inform guardians as well.

In describing the labor involved in guiding a writing center, the new directors identified three main categories. The first was paperwork tasks, including filing, scheduling, appointment logging, and record keeping. The second category involved communication with tutors and managing peer tutors, with one director noting that tutors ‘cannot be left alone.’ The third category focused on content-related responsibilities, such as developing general sessions on writing and research skills, as well as extracurricular activities like planning creative writing competitions, language games, and lyric writing. Many directors described their work as highly challenging, as they learned on the job. The editor mentality, essential in grading, remains prevalent, especially in schools where grading authority is significant, and tutors are often under time pressure.

Another source of pressure came from misinformed teachers who brought 'clients' to the center, expecting tutors to perform miracles by fixing poorly written essays. In response, one school director strongly recommended linking the writing center with fun activities as a successful strategy for engaging students. As for the types of assignments commonly addressed in the centers, they included personal statements, MUN position papers, SAT rhetorical analysis sections, response essays, and IB essays–primarily supporting students in their English classes. However, in some schools, the service expanded into content areas such as history and economics. Notably, the observed growth among students was not limited to language or lower-order concerns. Improvements were seen in idea organization, appreciation of the concept of second readers, and frequent use of center resources such as handouts.

Short and long-term plans

Since the newly established centers were still in their nascent stage, they made short-term plans for their immediate survival as well as long-term ones they aspired to achieve. The common denominator in the short-term phase was a focus on building more awareness about their centers among students and faculty. The proposed strategies ranged from approaching students during the schools' bimonthly assemblies, to including a section on the writing center in the school handbook, and informing all faculty from grades 7 to 12 about the services. Expanding to other disciplines such as mathematics and the sciences, and bringing more teachers on board, were also seen as ways to increase the center's success. The long-term plans targeted more students, such as those in grade 10, and involved sharing the experience with sister schools, in addition to documenting the service through annual reports. Undoubtedly, the challenges ahead were a key concern for the new directors. These challenges mainly related to the sustainability of the centers–with peer tutors and faculty being the main concern–along with maintaining the motivation levels of both tutors and directors and finding convenient schedules for all parties.

Phase 4 - Post Five years of Operation: Short-Term Achievements, Constraints, and Long-Term Goals

In 2021, five years after the launch of various school writing centers, the same four directors were revisited–this time through an online survey–and asked about the operation of their centers in light of new developments at their schools, in addition to changes at the national and global levels (see Appendix B for the questions). The value of their centers to their institutions remained relatively stable, except in one case where a change in administration affected its standing. They described the center as a meeting place for both teachers and students to work on a variety of writing related material. It was deemed vital by the administration when they saw what students could achieve, but at times, they questioned whether the writing center was duplicating the work of the support for learning center by providing student assistance beyond class hours. In one school, the 'Right Place' was highly supported by the administration despite the many challenges in Lebanon with the shift to online teaching, and it continued to operate during teachers' scheduled office hours. However, in another school, the center was highly valued during its inaugural year, but its importance waned the following year since the new principal was not aware of its value. Hence, the leadership of any school can have positive as well as adverse effects on its writing centers.

Major Constraints

The constraints over the five-year period were mainly connected to scheduling and became more apparent with the shift to online platforms during the pandemic. This new mode made the involvement of peer tutors more challenging than having them trained and working on-site. Another significant constraint was financial, as teachers were not compensated for tutoring in the center, which led to a decrease in motivation. Additionally, a lack of support from the school

principal was a major challenge. A third constraint was logistical, again exacerbated by the pandemic. For example, some schools that had previously offered services during breaks or after school on Friday afternoons had to adapt to virtual sessions, with one school, for instance, requiring students to email for an appointment via Microsoft Teams.

Available Resources

As far as resources are concerned, most centers maintained the same resources, except for one, which faced budget cuts, while another received an increase in funding. This variation reflects the level of administrative support, which directly impacts the availability of resources. When asked about whether changes occurred in their job description as directors, the majority felt it remained the same with many of them doing the tutoring in addition to directing to ensure the continuity of the center due to a shortage of tutors. Some also volunteered to lead workshops, and in one exceptional case, a director's teaching load was reduced to allow for more focus on the center.

Successes and Achievements

To describe their major successes, one director highlighted helping graduating students compile properly written e-portfolios for universities in Lebanon and abroad. Another noted success in positioning the center as the only place where writers could receive clear, constructive feedback on their work. A key achievement for one director was initiating a team of passionate tutors who provided free SAT analytical essay writing lessons, as well as encouraging staff at other schools to establish writing centers. Clearly, some successes were short-term, while others were long-term goals. The most significant success for one director was the ability to better support middle school students in an online setting. This demonstrates how such a support system can enhance student learning in alternative formats, not just face-to-face.

Multilevel Failures

Reflecting on their failures and shortcomings, the directors' descriptions were similar. The failures were at the level of tutors, teachers, students and record keeping. Some directors struggled to involve student tutors, as they were reluctant to give up their lunch breaks. At the teacher level, the failures were more concerning; some teachers still resisted recommending the center to their students, believing that tutors could do better than them. This reluctance stemmed from their fear of inadequacy, even though some had been trained as tutors themselves. At the student level, attracting young learners without teacher encouragement was difficult, and motivating high school students to visit independently remained a challenge. Marketing the center was a concern, particularly when other departments, which assigned writing tasks in their content areas, were not involved. The shift to online learning did not always result in effective tutoring sessions. Documentation of services also proved challenging; while some directors managed to submit annual or semi-annual reports, others were occupied with administrative duties. Time constraints were a major issue, as some directors also coordinated English for middle and high school and taught

multiple classes, which made record-keeping difficult. Paradoxically, one director found it easier to track visitation data in the online setting using TEAMS. Looking ahead, while timetable conflicts remained a concern, the country's unstable conditions–frequent power cuts, electricity shortages, and weak connection–were seen as the most significant challenges for staff performance.

As far as the type of assignments they were receiving, minimal changes were noted, such as the addition of test preparation courses. However, a more noticeable trend was the increased interest from adults in having their work reviewed. In terms of staffing, most centers maintained their teams, with greater involvement from English teachers and, unexpectedly, an overt interest from other departments as well.

These accounts serve two purposes: they reflect the struggles and successes that were experienced by these school directors and can become useful references for future directors who might benefit from the experiences of established writing centers.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Lebanese schools that successfully launched writing centers through this project can share their experiences with public schools in need of language support, despite limited funding. While securing financial resources is crucial, alternatives can help alleviate budget constraints. For example, a school representative could attend writing center training workshops at a university and then train future tutors within the school. An alternative recommendation would be for a university writing center, or an already established school writing center, to reach out to another school in need and mentor its staff to manage a potential center. Additionally, twinning projects of schools from different regions can help them exchange ideas as well as resources. This project revealed the importance of aligning the needs of schools and universities, with higher education institutions serving as advisory references to help schools meet expectations and achieve common goals. Collaboration opportunities should be considered at the national and regional levels.

For sustainability, once school writing centers are established, whether public or private, ongoing tutor training is essential to adapt to new developments in the field, ensuring long-term success. Launching writing centers is not enough; sustaining them is crucial for their growth. Additionally, involving all subject matter teachers, not just English teachers, is vital to fostering respect for the service and helping them understand its value.

One recurrent challenge is the need to attract peer tutors, so one solution could be to have honors students serve as tutors. Moreover, those who show interest but are not necessarily honor students can be trained and their hours of tutoring can be counted to fulfill their community service requirement, which has recently been introduced in some schools. Success stories occur mostly when the writing center can be linked to specific school needs.

Other factors to be considered, given the regional linguistic background, are the specific needs for ESL writers that should be catered to following the pragmatic approach advised by Thonus (1993). The American model cannot be blindly applied without considering the unique needs of second language learners such as the knowledge of grammar and language mechanics that affect unity, organization, and coherence when writing in English. Schiera (2020) has cautioned that in the MENA region, students are learning English and learning how to write in English, which dictates specific needs that a writing center can supplement. He insists that tutoring materials should cater to multilingual writers, so directors should not only rely on U.S. manuals or other imported handbooks. He uses the metaphor of understanding the make-up of the 'soil' to aid in its treatment to produce better plants, much the same way that understanding positioning in tutor training documents supports how tutors and students interact. The connection between writing center practice and theory, in and outside of the MENA region, is still lacking. This project confirmed that novice directors were able to take an American seed, plant it in Lebanese soil, and cultivate it into a germinating crop with the potential for export to other MENA regions.

Finally, Honein-Shehadi's (2007) prediction about the uniqueness of writing centers tailored to their setting proved accurate, as the emerging writing center directors addressed the specific needs of each institution. This was evident in the school writing centers established in Lebanon following the 2016 project, where the multifaceted benefits of such centers were demonstrated.

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Appendix A

Phase 3 Follow-up Questions with Emerging Writing Center Directors

1. What motivated the work you took?
2. What does the work mean to your institution/school?
3. What are the motivators and constraints of your job?
4. What resources are available to you?
5. Do you struggle for visibility? (Administration, faculty, student levels)
6. What is the work of directing WCs? Non-tutoring work?
7. Tell/ describe your work lives (conflicts, successes & emotions, tips for other schools)
8. What are the short/ long-term plans?
9. What are the challenges ahead?
10. What type of assignments was popular at your Center? (English/ non-English, etc.)
11. Have you observed any improvements?

12. How are your Writing Centers staffed? (English faculty, faculty from other disciplines, peer tutors, volunteers)
13. How do you document the service (annual reports)

Appendix B

Phase 4 Follow-up Questions with Emerging Writing Center Directors

1. Can you describe the level of your motivation at present?
2. What does the writing center mean to your institution five years after its establishment?
3. What constraints of the job have you experienced over the past five years?
4. Do you still enjoy the same resources you previously had?
5. Are there any changes in your job description as a director? Are there new responsibilities to the work you already do?
6. What were your successes and failures so far?
7. Were you able to achieve your long-term plans?
8. What are the challenges ahead?
9. Have you noticed any changes in the type of assignments?
10. Were there any changes in the staffing of your center?
11. Have you managed to document your service in annual reports? If so, were they effective?

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English as Capital vs. Language as Cultural: An Autoethnography of an Iranian Writer

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on linguistic imperialism has explained the dominance resulting from structural and cultural inequalities that put English language and culture above any other (Phillipson, 1992). We can enrich the macro-level scholarship on this subject by listening to the voices and complex experiences of individuals who are affected by these histories of linguistic imperialism. To present more nuanced and situated experiences, I narrate and analyze my own English writing journey as an Iranian writer who learned English in Iran and is now a PhD student in Composition and Rhetoric in the U.S., to trace the relationship between the ideologies of English as capital and language as cultural. My autoethnography shows that the spread of English is not inherently good or bad, but how it impacts its users depends on the way it gets appraised against other languages. I consider culturally sustaining pedagogy as an affirmative possibility, but also, my case shows that culturally sustaining pedagogies can be complicated in contexts where there are conflicting cultural values. I hope my multilayered experience in various contexts will induce productive questions that will lead to a more capacious view of language and more effective and inclusive writing pedagogies.

Introduction

Throughout my life, I have had different relationships with English: learner, translator, teacher, researcher, writer. Each of these roles, in conjunction with my being a native Persian speaker, has added to my understanding of the social life of languages, but I have never had a more complicated relationship with the languages and cultures that I know than I have now as a PhD student of Composition and Rhetoric in the U.S. While I have always been proud of my knowledge of English and how it has paved my way to success, learning about raciolinguistics, the co-naturalization of language and race (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017), and the concept that English has spread through imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) has given me a new perspective on how languages and cultures are valued. Now, through the lens of what I have learned in the U.S., I am reflecting on my experiences with English and writing education in my home country, Iran, and I am trying to demonstrate how languages and cultures get appraised and designated as high or low value in the lives of second language learners of English. Particularly, I aim to complicate the scholarship on linguistic imperialism and culturally sustaining pedagogy by analyzing my own complex relationship with the languages I speak and the varying contexts in which I learned and used them as a transnational writer. While the growing body of scholarship on such theories addresses broader scopes and takes more definite stances, positive or negative, on the concepts of language as capital and/or cultural, my autoethnography shows that the spread of English is not inherently good or bad. Rather, how it impacts its users depends on the way it gets valued against other languages. In addition, my case shows that culturally sustaining pedagogies can be complicated in contexts with conflicting cultural values. I believe autoethnographies like mine and case studies focused on local experiences are critical in enriching existing literature by including the voices and complex experiences of individuals who are affected by the theories and histories of linguistic imperialism.

MENA Writing Studies Journal, vol. 1.1, Spring 2025, pp. 65-73

Learning English in Iran

It is the year 2000, I am six and excited to go to school to learn to read and write. I am fascinated with the words that my dad puts in his journal every night, and I am greedy to read all the books in his library—less the ones with plants in them that relate to his work and more the ones with stories. He says some of them are from other countries, written first in another language and then translated into Persian. Persian is the language we speak at home, and I am curious about the languages that other people speak at home, especially where these storybooks come from.

He says learning other languages is very important, especially English. He does not speak English, and he regrets it. He has missed so many opportunities because of it. He wanted to attend medical school, but he could not, because he had to know English to pass the entrance exam. That is why he studied plant protection and became a doctor of plants. After graduation, when he could have gone abroad for graduate school, the same burden prevented him. He keeps repeating "Nowadays, you are illiterate if you can't speak English and can't work with a computer." We do not yet have a computer at home, but we have English books.

I am still six. My dad takes my older sister and me to an English Language Institute to enroll us. I am excited. I see a glass cabinet full of colorful books and cassette tapes. The principal, an old man whom my dad seems to know, looks kind. We will only learn English there, twice a week for an hour and a half. He gives me my books, one in color and another in black and white, with a cassette tape. Later, at school, I realize some other classmates go to similar classes, too. One of them mentions that her family wants her to join her aunt in New York when she grows up. I try to find New York on the map when I return home. I need to ask my dad for help. He says I might be able to go too, if I learn English. I must learn English.

It is the year 2005, and I am eleven, finishing elementary school. At the end of the year, I exchange notebooks with classmates to write a few words for each other. I copy what my previous teacher at the English Language Institute wrote in my notebook, change a few parts, and write it for a classmate. A few days later, I see her mom on the street, amazed and impressed by my writing in English. She asks many questions about where I am learning English and when I started. She asks whether I have passed the TOEFL test. She has heard it is important, but I have no idea what it is.

It is the year 2006, and I am twelve. I started middle school this year, and we now have English classes at school. I am disappointed at how basic the lessons are, which I later realize is because English teaching is restricted in Iran's public curriculum due to political reasons that resist the hegemony of English (Kiany, et al., 2011; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022). Simultaneously, I am proud of my English language proficiency. I do not need to study for the tests at all, but ironically, I am perceived as more hardworking and intelligent. My English teacher favors me, and my classmates come to me to ask for help with things they struggle with, things that I only know because I go to English Language Institutes, a privilege that many of my classmates do not have. For an assignment,

we are to write a passage with the grammatical rules we have recently learned. One of my friends comes to me asking what the equivalent of "راه پله" [staircase] is in English. I do not know, but I tell her I will ask my teacher at the English Language Institute. When I bring her the word "staircase," I find out she has gone through all the words in her pocket English-to-Persian dictionary, the only one she has, and found the word. I ask my dad later how much it costs him to pay for my English classes. Apparently, many people cannot afford it (Haghighi and Norton, 2017).

Gradually, the English we learn at school gets more complicated, but it is still so basic compared to that of my English Language Institute classes. I started early and am advanced now. The English classes at school are uninteresting to me, not because I know the content or because we speak in Persian almost all the time, but because the content seems artificial. I am used to colorful books that teach me English songs and information about other countries, not conversations and passages that seem like a translation of what we do every day in Persian. School textbooks seem to be just "a translation of the Islamic-Iranian culture into English words" (Rassouli & Osam, 2019, p. 10), but in my mind, English is the language of the outside, the world, and Persian the language of our inner, everyday life. Also, English is not as important at schools and in national media as it is to ordinary people in real life (Riazi, 2005; Rassouli & Osam, 2019; Moharami & Daneshfar, 2022). While our families tell us we need English to have more opportunities in the future, at school and on TV, we repeatedly hear about how the western countries are bad and corrupt and how we must not allow their cultures to contaminate our rich, religious one. We get extra credit to go to anti-American protests after the Friday group prayers. Most of my friends and I never go, but one of my religious friends does. She is also my classmate at the English Language Institute.

It is the year 2009. I am fifteen and in my first year of high school. Miss N, our English teacher in a small all-girl class at an English Language Institute, asks us to write an imaginary conversation with a boy on a date. Going on a date is forbidden in our culture without intentions of marriage, but I have seen some in the movies. During the next session, Miss N apologizes for the assignment and the confusion it might have caused. She seems irritated. Apparently, some parents complained to the principal about how this assignment was against their religious beliefs. I do not understand this reaction, as none of our lessons or assignments in the English Language Institute are related to our culture or religion but are mainly references to western countries and native English speakers (Khodadady & Shayesteh, 2016)—the exact opposite of what happens in English classes at school. At the English Language Institute, we learn about western cities, celebrities, and holidays. We learn English from "imported commercial textbooks" (Naghdipour, 2016, p. 84), and it seems natural to me to learn about their culture while learning their language. In fact, learning about their culture is one of the reasons I am learning their language. I want to see what is going on outside of our borders.

It is 2010. I am sixteen and excited to watch a Hollywood movie in class that my teacher at the English Language Institute promised to play us last session. The movie is about an English teacher and her son who go to an Asian country and teach the people of the king's court. While there, she

falls in love with the king. While we are watching, our teacher pauses and writes down some new words and phrases on the board. We cannot watch the whole movie, though, because some parts are against the country's Islamic ideals (*Iran Bans Movies*, 2005), and the institute, as a "culturally hybrid" space that must navigate Iranian and global cultural practices, needs to act accordingly (Haghighi & Norton, 2017, p. 436). However, I download and watch the whole movie when I return home.

I am still sixteen. We have an assignment to write a letter to the president to tell them about the changes our city needs. During the next session, after returning the papers, our teacher, who also teaches at one of the universities in our town, tells us that she has marked one of our pieces as the best she has ever seen among all the students she has had. I check my paper and find out it is mine. She asks me whether my Persian writing is as good. I tell her that it is not; I focus more on writing in English as I plan to seek an international audience in the future. English is the language that sets me apart and will help me grow, while everyone around me knows only Persian. On top of that, Persian is only useful in Iran, but English, as the lingua franca, allows me to communicate with the world.

Seeking Jobs

It is 2020. I am twenty-six and recently received my master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Iran. While I work remotely as a translator, my uncle, who is a banker, comes to me and tells me about his friend who is making a lot of money trading online with a kind of application. He says he has also been able to get a Visa card, which is impossible for us due to our banking system being isolated from the world because of political sanctions. He says because I know English and can easily read international websites, I would be successful in such jobs, and my knowledge would go to waste if I do not make money with it. It seems like all the trendy and well-paid jobs that people recommend these days need a certain level of English language proficiency, while at the same time, the government is planning to substitute English with other languages, such as Chinese, at schools (*Iranian Students Discouraged*, 2018; Hashemi, 2023).

It is 2021, I am twenty-seven, and the economic situation in Iran is not at all satisfactory. The value of our currency is dropping daily due to the sanctions and no matter how much Iranian Rials you make, it is never enough. Searching for job opportunities, I see an ad on Instagram about a webinar on "Making Dollars in Iran," presented by a startup based in the same university where I received my bachelors. I register. During the webinar, one of the cofounders introduces content writing for websites with an English-speaking audience as the best way to make dollars in Iran. To prove his point and show us how much progress we can make in the future, he mentions that he is now working with a website based in the U.S., supervising American writers even though he is a non-native English speaker. Then he announces that they are hiring. I apply, and after a general English test, an interview, and the submission of my academic article as a writing sample, my one-month internship starts, during which I must take their online courses on English content writing and submit assignments.

Despite having written in English for years and taking multiple Coursera courses, I find the instructions extremely helpful. Focusing on audience and purpose, providing examples, and explicit mapping out of the structure of a website article and the steps I need to take to write help me the most. For the first few articles, I am graded on different criteria and the editor expresses how impressed he is by my progress. After I submit each blog post, usually ranging from 1,000 to 3,500 words and covering different topics, the editor revises it and submits it to the client. I follow his changes in google docs to learn what I need to do differently in my next article. The money is not great compared to the time it takes, but I enjoy the job and feel like I am growing in the process and becoming a more confident writer. Little do I know that this writing practice is paving my future path.

American Graduate School

It is 2023, and I am twenty-nine. After spending a year preparing for the TOEFL test, passing the test with a good score, searching universities all over the world, emailing and talking to different professors, and going abroad to apply for a visa, I am finally a PhD student in the U.S. in a program that a year ago, I had no idea existed: Composition and Rhetoric. I have a very vague idea of what this major consists of, but I know I will be writing and studying writing and writers, and I am absolutely thrilled about it. Writing in English has always been my passion, and I think I am well-equipped for it. My dad is proud of me. So am I.

However, life here does not seem to be as smooth and exciting as I thought it would be. The gist of my first semester is that I am stressed and confused. I need to adjust to so many new things and the beloved English, which I worked so hard to learn, is failing me. I spend so much time studying texts and preparing for classes, but I cannot participate as much as I would like to in discussions. I acknowledge that a significant cause of this might be due to differences in pedagogical strategies: at home, critical thinking is not effectively present (Abednia et al., 2021) compared to graduate school in the U.S., where it is a requirement. Nonetheless, another contributing factor is that English education in Iran emphasizes linguistic conventions and grammar, but in the U.S., the emphasis is on how it's used. Therefore, in the new environment, I sense weaknesses in my English performance, including my listening and speaking skills. I have trouble following academic and non-academic conversations happening in classes, which in turn diminishes my ability to participate. I am always afraid of saying something that does not make sense in relation to what has been said, in case I have missed something, or even worse, it is culturally inappropriate. I also feel a huge gap in my speaking ability in front of a mainly native speaking audience. The urge to imitate their tone and accent and even pace of speaking, and being unable to do so, makes me prefer to keep quiet most of the time so that I am not perceived as incompetent. I am where I have always wanted to be, but I feel displaced. Language barriers and cultural differences that I experience after crossing geographical borders make my long-sought, manifested dream feel bitter-sweet.

Persian, on the other hand, has become so dear to me. Although at home, I neglected Persian because I felt like it would not serve me in reaching my goals of learning about other cultures, having an international audience for my writing, and migrating to a place with better financial prospects, I feel more emotionally tied to Persian in the U.S. While English is still the language that serves my ambitions, speaking in Persian with my Iranian friends feels like a cool breeze on a hot summer afternoon. It is a part of my identity that feels like home, and I am more confident and comfortable in using it. However, the more I speak in Persian, the more difficult it is for me to switch back to English. My languages are wrestling and no matter which one is taking over, I am the one who is facing the consequences.

In my second semester, I learn about transnational literacy and culturally sustaining pedagogy, and am fascinated by the idea that people are on the move and there are no boundaries around the languages that they speak (Leonard, 2018). What sticks in my mind is that people's languages and cultures can be sites for their learning (Meier et al., 2023), and instead of trying to fit everyone into the English language and culture, we can invite them to use their own culture and language to learn new concepts. I think about how this might be possible in my own case in the U.S. While this use of my own language and culture is encouraged in almost all my graduate classes, it seems impractical. How can I use Persian in discussions or in my writing when no one else understands it? Even if I decide to do so, how can my professors support and help me in a class where I am the only one speaking this language and coming from this culture? Using Persian is neither practical nor beneficial to me in this new context. But what histories prevent this and what should change to make graduate schools more inclusive in this sense?

I am also learning that there is some value to more locally driven language and literature curricula. However, when I reflect on my own English education, I see that in the context of my country, there is a question of what locally driven culture means. Leadership, state, local communities, families, etc. have different and sometimes conflicting views on culture, which makes it more complicated to create locally driven curricula and, as a learner, to navigate your way through these different views. As Rassouli and Osam (2019) illustrate, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, an educational reform was put forth by the government which aimed to produce "the 'perfect humankind' being devoted to Islamic lifestyle" (p. 3). To the current authorities, the teaching of foreign languages, such as English, is seen as a threat to "the Islamic and national identity of Iranians," so the Ministry of Education deployed a strategy to teach foreign languages within the framework of Islamic values. Consequently, school textbooks "do not aim at enlarging the cultural repertoire of the Iranian students in the English language and limit productive skills by employing parroting tasks and grammar translation approach toward teaching the English language" (p. 10). However, despite these views and endeavors, "the English language has smoothly found its way to the heart of Iranians" (p. 10) as they believe it helps them with "meeting new people, finding jobs both in Iran and in other countries, as well as pursuing further education" (p. 7) and "locating social status" (p. 10). With such conflicting values around English, adopting locally driven language and literature curricula seems quite challenging.

I also learn about linguistic imperialism and the idea that English language and culture are deemed to be above others due to structural and cultural inequalities (Phillipson, 1992), and I read Donahue's (2009) critique of the export-based approach of U.S. scholars in the internationalization of English language and writing instruction. I learn about language standardization and how Standard English is seen and taught as the dominant variety, diminishing the value of others (Curzan et al., 2023), and I am struck by Flores and Rosa's (2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017) argument about raciolinguistics, or the co-naturalization of language and race. I learn about the historical injustice that has led to discrimination against certain languages and language varieties, and it makes me think about how power imbalances related to the education of English language and writing impact how languages and cultures are valued. All these ideas I am learning about lead me to reflect on the low value my mother tongue, Persian, has had in helping me achieve my educational and professional success. I am now trying to work through the many layers of my experience by understanding the growth of English in terms of capitalism and imperialism while simultaneously acknowledging its positive effects on my life in building my confidence and providing me with numerous opportunities. In light of this, I am trying to work out how to keep the best of my experiences alongside countering those histories of imperialism and capitalism. I want to find a way to use my own culture and language in my scholarship and support others to do the same.

In my experience, problems are not inherent to languages and cultures but to the way they are applied and appraised. While I enjoyed learning English language and culture, I wish that my opportunities were not mainly dependent on mastering the English language and that my mother tongue could be valued globally and present the opportunities that English seems to. Growing up in Iran, I valued English more than my mother tongue because it was associated with higher class and intelligence, and as a lingua franca, it was a means to help me pursue educational and financial success. After migration, I can rarely use Persian in my learning process or academic writing because again, English dominates graduate schools in the U.S., and as an international student, I feel the pressure to use it perfectly, the way its native speakers do. But if such capitalistic and imperialistic views, specifically where English is seen as currency for education, employment, travel, etc., are undone and languages and cultures are not valued hierarchically, local attempts at implementing culturally sustaining pedagogies in teaching English might not turn into defensive ways to erase the English culture altogether, as happens in English text-books published in Iran and taught at local schools. In this way, English can be learned and used to facilitate communication between nations and exchange of cultures, which is what I was genuinely interested in when I started learning English but could not find in school. And maybe in such a context, transnational writers could have an opportunity to use their mother tongue and culture in their academic education in an English-speaking environment, where English proficiency is a means, not an end. This capacious view of language, I believe, is what we need to strive for to support the notion of language as cultural.

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Unravelling the Dilemma: Examining the Adverse Effects of AI Writing Tools on STEM Student Motivation–Insights from an Academic Writing Center

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ABSTRACT

The increasing utilization of AI-powered writing tools, such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, has transformed how students engage with academic writing and research, particularly in STEM disciplines. While these tools provide valuable assistance in refining language, improving structure, and enhancing clarity, excessive reliance on them has raised concerns about diminishing students' intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, and overall engagement with the writing process. Drawing on firsthand observations from an Academic Writing Center (AWC) in the GCC region, this think piece examines the broader implications of AI-assisted writing on student motivation. The paper explores how overdependence on GenAI has contributed to declining student engagement, a reduction in deep analytical thinking, and the emergence of a shortcut mentality that undermines the intellectual rigor essential to higher education. Given these challenges, academic writing centers play a crucial role in ensuring that GenAI serves as a tool for enhancement rather than a replacement of cognitive effort. By fostering a balanced approach that integrates technological support with human mentorship, writing centers in higher education institutions can encourage responsible GenAI usage while preserving the foundational principles of independent thought, critical inquiry, and academic integrity.

Introduction

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in academic writing has transformed how students approach their coursework, particularly in STEM disciplines. While GenAI tools like Grammarly and ChatGPT offer invaluable support for language proficiency and structural accuracy, overreliance on them can inadvertently undermine key motivational drivers critical to writing success, such as curiosity, creativity, and self-efficacy. Motivational consequences of GenAI are particularly evident in STEM students, whose technical focus often sidelines the development of essential academic writing skills.

Writing centers play a pivotal role in addressing these challenges. Beyond improving technical writing skills, they act as hubs for fostering intrinsic motivation by emphasizing the writing process, promoting active engagement, and helping students navigate the ethical use of GenAI tools. Drawing on observations and experiences from a specific Academic Writing Center (AWC), this think piece highlights how writing centers can mitigate GenAI-induced motivational challenges while catering to the unique needs of STEM students. Findings are further contextualized within the broader cultural and educational framework of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), where writing centers are often

underutilized yet essential for bridging skill gaps. The Academic Writing Center will be referred to as the AWC throughout this discussion.

By examining local challenges and practical strategies, this piece aims to provide actionable insights into how writing centers can become catalysts for motivation and skill development in the AI era. Ultimately, this piece seeks to reframe writing centers, often perceived by many STEM students as just remedial spaces focused only on fixing errors — as transformative environments where STEM students can regain their intrinsic motivation to write.

About the Academic Writing Center

The AWC is dedicated to supporting students across all programs in the Business, Health Science, Engineering, General Education, and IT Colleges at the University of Doha for Science and Technology. Staffed by skilled writing mentors, the center assists students at every stage of their writing—whether it is planning, revising, editing, referencing, or proofreading. The center also offers tailored skill development sessions designed to enhance academic writing performance. Most recently, support services have expanded into the Business and Accounting Help Centers to cater to a high demand for business course support, and the English Success Zone to assist foundation students transition to their bachelor's degree program.

AWC services cover a wide range of student needs, including brainstorming, general writing consultations, personalized guidance, report formatting, citation and referencing help, proofreading, presentation content support, and speech script writing. These offerings are continually refined based on student feedback and demand. Beyond individual consultations, the AWC also provides in-class writing support and hosts workshops and discussions on academic integrity and personal skill development. The AWC's comprehensive approach ensures that students have the right tools, resources, and confidence to succeed in their academic writing endeavors. In the following section, the specific case of GCC students' motivation in regard to academic writing will be elaborated upon.

STEM Students in the GCC Region

The integration of GenAI in academic writing has revolutionized how students approach their coursework. GenAI writing tools have provided support in areas such as grammar, structure, and idea generation. However, their increasing use—particularly among STEM students—has exposed a critical challenge: the potential wearing down of intrinsic motivation. Based on our observations, reduced motivation is especially pronounced among STEM students, who often prioritize technical accuracy over developing robust writing skills. However, Dyrberg and Holmegaard (2019) found that integrating STEM content with real-world problems boosts students perceived value of education, leading to higher engagement and effort. This connection is particularly relevant in the context of growing reliance on GenAI tools, which may offer quick solutions but rarely promote the kind of deep, applied thinking that real-world tasks require. Beyond that, the AWC is rooted in an

environment that emphasizes applied STEM learning, further complicating the already challenging balance between their academic and professional aspirations. Thus, enhancing the real-world relevance of writing assignments could improve students' motivation (Pulford, 2016).

The AWC is uniquely positioned to address these challenges. Beyond offering technical writing support, they act as transformative spaces that promote intrinsic motivation, encourage active engagement with the writing process, and provide ethical guidance on GenAI use. In the context of the GCC, where STEM education plays a pivotal role in driving national development, writing centers face the additional challenge of navigating a culturally and linguistically diverse student body. This think piece responds to the gap identified by Kayan-Fadlelmula et al. (2021) by offering practitioner-based insights into STEM student motivation which is an area that remains significantly under-researched in the region.

The GCC's rapid push toward knowledge-based economies has positioned STEM education as a cornerstone of national progress (Kayan-Fadlelmula et al., 2021). However, STEM students in the region face distinct challenges. Many are non-native English speakers studying in English-dominant academic environments, creating a dual cognitive burden that complicates their ability to write critically and analytically. Additionally, the region's education systems have traditionally emphasized rote learning over interdisciplinary and creative approaches (Al-Kuwari et al., 2022), further hindering the development of writing skills critical for STEM disciplines.

Overreliance on GenAI tools worsens these challenges, offering quick solutions but diminishing opportunities for students to develop originality and engage deeply with the academic writing process. Writing centers counteract these trends by adopting a culturally nuanced and student-focused approach. For instance, the AWC currently consists of bilingual mentors fluent in both Arabic and English. Given that a significant portion of the student population in the GCC are native Arabic speakers for whom English is a second language, this linguistic accessibility helps foster stronger connections and makes academic writing support more inclusive and effective. Moreover, tailored workshops open to all univesity students, as well as interdisciplinary collaborations between the AWC, academic colleges, and faculty members bridge the gap between STEM and humanities education. These initiatives emphasize the value of writing as a critical thinking process, encouraging students to see writing not just as a task, but as an intellectual and creative pursuit.

In the GCC, where over 300,000 international STEM students are enrolled annually (Umar & Rahman, 2023), addressing writing-related challenges requires writing centers to move beyond the 'remedial' framing. While often viewed as places for fixing grammar or polishing final drafts, writing centers — particularly at our institution — are being reimagined as transformative hubs for motivation and skill development. By helping students navigate the balance between leveraging GenAI and preserving intrinsic learning, writing centers empower them to meet academic demands with greater confidence and ownership. In the next section, two main sources of motivation are identified and discussed.

Understanding Motivation in the Context of the AWC

Motivation, as perceived by the AWC, is a blend of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that drive students to excel in academic writing. Intrinsic motivation, which stems from genuine interest and personal satisfaction, promotes perseverance, improvement, and pride in one's work. According to Augustyniak et al. (2016), intrinsic motivation is associated with greater determination and productivity; students who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to persist through challenges, which can lead to higher achievement and academic success. The AWC promotes intrinsic motivation through personalized and group assistance, one-on-one consultations, and engaging workshops that help students build skills and confidence. By offering constructive feedback and a supportive environment, the AWC inspires students to embrace the writing process, find meaning in their efforts, and achieve their academic writing goals.

Students who are extrinsically motivated focus on achieving outcomes separate from the activity itself, rather than enjoying the task for its own sake (Khaliq et al., 2023). While valuable in competitive fields like STEM, extrinsic motivation often drives students to meet external expectations, such as high grades or minimal requirements, without regard for the process or the essential soft skills they should be acquiring along the way. Extrinsically motivated students are more susceptible to focusing solely on the end goal, often dismissing how they achieve it. The AWC acknowledges this dynamic and works to help students balance extrinsic pressures with intrinsic engagement. Through tailored guidance and resources, the AWC encourages extrinsically motivated students to engage more deeply with their coursework, fostering stronger writing skills and a deeper sense of purpose. The following section explores key AWC observations and their implications for improving writing support tailored to students' diverse motivational needs.

AWC Observations and Implications for Writing Support

Use of AI Tools

Since ChatGPT's release, the AWC has observed a profound shift in how students approach writing assignments, particularly with the widespread adoption of GenAI tools. These tools, celebrated for their accessibility and efficiency, have empowered students to work independently, often reducing their reliance on specific AWC consultations. For many, GenAI has enhanced motivation by alleviating tedious aspects of the writing process, such as grammar checks, idea generation, and referencing. By streamlining these tasks, students can devote more time and energy to challenging elements like analysis and argumentation, boosting their confidence in managing assignments.

However, the increased reliance on GenAI tools has also revealed a troubling trend: a decline in intrinsic motivation among some students. This observation is based on consistent trends in service utilization that we tracked over several academic terms. General Writing Consultations still make

up the largest share of visits, but shifts in other categories point to changing patterns of student engagement. Students appear to be turning to GenAI tools for early stage writing support, while increasingly using AWC services for tasks closer to the final stage – particularly for assistance with citations, formatting, and proofreading.

The convenience of GenAI has, in certain cases, cultivated a shortcut mentality, where students perceive these tools as substitutes for their efforts. This has resulted in draft submissions that lack originality, deviate from assignment instructions, or reflect minimal engagement with the writing process. In these cases, motivation appears extrinsically driven, focused on meeting deadlines or achieving grades, rather than rooted in a genuine desire to learn or improve.

The dual impact of GenAI tools on student motivation presents both opportunities and challenges for the AWC. On one hand, GenAI offers a supplement to student learning, fostering independence and confidence. On the other hand, its overuse risks undermining key motivational drivers like curiosity, creativity, and self-efficacy, particularly in disciplines where writing is often seen as secondary, such as STEM fields. Darwin et al. (2023) note that over-reliance on GenAI can hinder critical thinking and creativity, leading to superficial understanding.

To address these concerns, the AWC has adopted a proactive, comprehensive approach. Workshops, classroom visits, and peer discussions emphasize the value of originality, critical thinking, and ethical GenAI use. For example, GenAI can be used to brainstorm ideas, refine drafts, or enhance clarity, but it should not overshadow the importance of personal input and intellectual engagement. Additionally, the AWC raises awareness about plagiarism, academic dishonesty, and GenAI overdependence, while offering strategies for time management and skill development.

Motivation Disparities

Based on our understanding of motivation, the AWC has observed notable disparities in student engagement across different majors and colleges. These variations appear to stem from several factors, including the courses students enroll in, the relevance of those courses to their majors, and their personal interests.

We have observed that Health Science and Business students show higher intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for academic writing compared to IT and Engineering students. Health Science and Business students better understand the requirements and long-term benefits of writing tasks, especially in mandatory and elective courses related to social sciences and humanities. The courses mentioned in this paragraph focus on writing processes, report writing, academic research, and presentation skills. Students in Health Science and Business recognize the importance of strong written communication for their careers, which boosts their motivation to excel.

In contrast, IT and Engineering students often show less motivation for academic writing. Demotivation may stem from a perceived disconnect between writing tasks and their future roles,

which emphasize technical skills over communication. Students in IT and Engineering have limited opportunities for writing beyond lab reports, which are rarely assigned. As a result, students may undervalue writing skills and put less effort into these tasks, whilst also sporadically seeking help from the AWC, viewing writing as less relevant to their discipline. Consequently, these students often rely heavily on GenAI tools to draft lab reports, enabling them to focus on the technical and logical demands of coding and experiments.

Motivation disparities are also observed in the frequency of bookings for different AWC services. Students who choose Brainstorming & Writing Process and General or Personal Writing Consultation are often driven by innate curiosity and personal skill development. Such students are highly involved in the writing process, and many come back for Presentation Content Support and Speech Script Writing after completing their reports with the AWC's guidance. Though such students use GenAI tools, they understand their limitations and maintain academic honesty by disclosing their use of GenAI and cross-checking AI-generated content.

In contrast, the most in-demand AWC services—Citations & References, Report Formatting, and Review & Proofreading—tend to attract students who are less engaged with the writing process itself. Instead, their primary goal is to complete their academic requirements. While some students using these services have advanced writing skills such that they do not need the AWC's assistance besides secondary review, many students often use GenAI primarily to expedite their tasks rather than as a complementary tool to enhance their writing skills.

Based on the AWC mentors' experience, students are noticeably more motivated to write when the topics align with their majors or spark genuine interest. These students often approach the AWC, seeking support for minor issues like grammar, spelling, or citation corrections, demonstrating a strong grasp of the writing and research process. Conversely, students who view writing assignments as a chore tend to rely heavily on grades and credits as their primary motivation. For them, GenAI tools become a convenient way to complete tasks they deem unnecessary. While this approach may yield polished outputs, it often reflects minimal engagement with the content, with some submissions being entirely AI-generated— a clear indication of disinterest.

The Role of the Academic Writing Center

To address the unique challenges faced by STEM students in the GCC concerning GenAI, the AWC provides tailored writing support that bridges the gap between technical and communication skills. Recognizing the distinct demands of their disciplines, the AWC offers specialized resources such as samples and tipsheets aligned with STEM course curricula. By focusing on discipline-specific writing tasks, the AWC equips students with tools to navigate complex assignments while promoting clarity and precision in their writing. By implementing a personalized approach, the AWC tackles the issue of motivation disparities and assists students from all majors, including STEM, to help them receive targeted assistance that complements their core and communication courses. Additionally, AWC

mentors emphasize understanding assignment rubrics and handouts, helping students meet specific requirements and perform effectively across their academic writing journey.

Beyond individual and group consultations, the AWC extends its reach through workshops and in-class visits, fostering a culture of academic integrity and skill development. The workshops, which are part of a semesterly Learning Series, specifically teach students about prompt engineering, ethical use of GenAI in academia, and improving public speaking and presentation development. The Learning Series is strategically designed to introduce first-year students to foundational academic skills and incorporate the services formally offered at the AWC in a fun and interactive way, making them accessible to a larger audience.

The AWC also ramps up its efforts during critical academic periods, setting up booths around final exams, project submissions, and presentations to provide timely, accessible support. Additionally, upon instructors' request, AWC mentors visit classes to give presentations and directly assist students, focusing on ethical and effective use of GenAI tools. By offering targeted assistance at pivotal moments, the AWC ensures students are equipped to meet their academic demands while maintaining ethical practices.

The impact of the AWC's initiatives is reflected in measurable improvements in students' writing abilities and grades, particularly for those who engage with the center regularly. By building a solid foundation in writing during the early years, the AWC supports students' transition from beginner to advanced writers, preparing them for the rigorous expectations of final-year capstone projects and theses. Progression in writing skills not only boosts academic performance but also instills confidence in students, enabling them to approach complex tasks with clarity and precision. The next section explores key recommendations and future directions for academic writing centers to further enhance their impact.

Suggestions and Future Expectations for Academic Writing Centers

Building on the AWC's observations above, it is crucial to assess and identify the best next steps to pave the way for future expectations. To address the unique challenges faced by STEM students in the GCC, academic writing centers are encouraged to evolve to provide customized support across all disciplines. By collaborating closely with university professors, writing centers can develop resources that meet the specific needs of STEM fields while reinforcing critical thinking and novelty relevant to their course content. Workshops and in-class visits should focus on critical review and revision to ensure that students' work portrays their voice and understanding. Additionally, assignments that align with academic goals can help students better appreciate strong writing skills, potentially boosting their engagement with the subject matter.

Furthermore, we strongly recommend that writing centers involve faculty members more actively in shaping writing support decisions. Such collaboration would ensure that course rubrics and guidelines are regularly followed to ensure students receive timely support. By incorporating faculty

voices, course objectives can be followed, creating a fruitful blend of both technical and non-technical skills development.

As the role of AI continues to rapidly expand, writing centers also need to address its impact on students' learning processes. While GenAI can significantly enhance learning experiences by supplementing traditional learning methods, it falls short of replicating the personalized guidance, emotional connection, and nuanced understanding that only human interaction can provide. Victor (2023) emphasizes that while GenAI tools like ChatGPT can support learning, they cannot replace the vital role of educators, who offer the human touch necessary for effective and ethical education. Initiatives such as hosting regular workshops and in-class visits are essential in bridging this gap and to reinforce the irreplaceable role of humans in shaping holistic learning experiences. Examples offer workshops are outlined in the section on the role of academic writing centers.

In view of the increasing reliance on GenAI, it is also crucial for writing centers to deliver workshops customized for STEM students that promote ethical and responsible use of these tools. Writing competitions can encourage students to highlight their natural writing abilities, fostering both confidence and academic reputation. Furthermore, educating students on the limitations of AI-powered writing tools, such as data hallucination, wrong material, and missing references (Gimpel et al., 2023, p. 36) will ensure they develop critical thinking skills alongside their technical knowledge. Writing centers can stimulate skill development by creating detailed guidelines that offer students a step-by-step approach to the writing process.

To conclude, we have explored the growing reliance on GenAI by STEM students in academic writing, along with its potential to hinder the development of creative and authentic ideas. Future research must focus on balancing AI-assisted writing with traditional methods to enhance core educational goals, like effective writing, while addressing ethical concerns related to academic integrity. By tailoring resources to meet students' needs, fostering intrinsic motivation, and promoting ethical GenAI use, writing centers can ensure that technology complements the growth of skilled, independent writers. A tailored approach aligns with the broader goals of GCC universities: to prepare students not only for academic excellence but also for meaningful contributions to their fields.

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Reflections on the Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon: An Interview with Malakeh R. Khoury

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ABSTRACT
The aim of this article is to document and critically reflect upon the significance of a symposium for teachers of writing in English language medium universities in Lebanon that took place annually over the period of 2013-2019. To gain knowledge of this event, two of the authors conducted an interview with the symposium's co-creator and main organizer, Malakeh R. Khoury, and contextualized it in reflective discussions of local conditions. The article frames the symposium as a key national-level event in the local community of practice that responds to the need to organize local teachers of writing in the absence of other relevant channels of communication and exchange of expertise.

Keywords: symposium, writing instruction, community of practice, activity analysis, Lebanon

Introduction

Beginning in the fall of 2013 and continuing for six years, the *Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon* offered an annual venue for instructors of writing to meet "where they can be in conversation with each other to understand the specifics of their teaching context" (The Annual Symposium). This context entails teaching writing in institutions of higher education in Lebanon in which the language of instruction is English, and which operate within a complex educational landscape where Arabic is the primary spoken language, but formal education can occur within Arabic, French, English, Armenian, and other educational systems. The idea for the symposium emerged at the American University of Beirut during a period of institutional and programmatic change accelerated by the process of university reaccreditation that led to animated discussions about the teaching of writing in English in Lebanon. The original conception of the symposium spoke to a felt need for something that was missing: a space to foster reflective teaching practices, affirm a sense of agency, and build a sense of professional identity among writing instructors across institutions in Lebanon. In December 2019, the symposium was put on hold because of a precipitous economic downturn, and since then the hiatus has continued due to a number of challenges to universities and public life in Lebanon, including the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown, a devastating explosion in the port of Beirut, and war.

This article was conceived as a way of honoring the symposium as an effort to create a space for the exchange of local expertise and chronicling it as an important step towards forming a learning community for the teachers of writing in Lebanon, an effort that is also relevant across the region. Our goal is to redefine this forced "down time" as a moment of remembering, reflection, and exploring possibilities for renewed engagement in the local community of practice (Wenger, 2000), an in-between bridging past events with possibly new formats of engagement. We also wish to keep alive the memory of the symposium, to break what Hafeli (2009) terms as the cycle of oblivion and eternal

return and Thelin (2009) calls institutional amnesia, and to archive it for those who may wish to revive it or be inspired by this story in their own efforts.

Method

To create a more permanent and official record of the symposium and open it up to larger conversation, we invited Malakeh R. Khoury, the primary organizer of the event for five years, to an interview. In the process of developing the article, our project grew into a form of activity analysis (Palmquist et al., 2012) in which we began to see the symposium as "an expression of the will of existing community" or an enactment of its "public face" (ibid., p. 241-242). To develop as accurate as possible an understanding of what the symposium was and how it functioned in the local context, we compared the data generated via person- and text-based methods. We thus conducted an interview with Khoury, the symposium's co-creator, and unearthed the hidden archive (Lamos, 2012) of personal communication and other documents tucked away in files between our personal and office computers, flash drives, and e-mail. Our original set of interview questions grew from our individual experiences, as we, too, were involved in the symposium over the years as participants, speakers, and co-organizers. To record our conversation, we met via Zoom and used the software to create an interview transcript, which we cleaned for minor infidelities and then collectively coded for most salient themes.

Next, Khoury edited her responses to clarify emphasis of emerged themes, and the two remaining authors wrote the introduction, a concluding note, and introduced critical commentary (reflections) interspersed at key points throughout the interview to 1) clarify context where necessary for readers unfamiliar with the local writing community, 2) ground emerging themes in existing scholarship, and 3) understand how the symposium was continually shaped by complex interactions and at times contradicting motivations of its participants. One decision we faced involved privacy. The story of the symposium is made up of personal histories of individuals with varying levels of institutional support and powered largely by individual motivations. In our writing, we decided to weave as impersonal a story as possible, both to protect individuals and to allow them to tell their own story, should they choose to do so in response.

The Interview

Principled Practices

Dorota Fleszar: What was the symposium? How would you describe it? How did it start? What actually happened?

Malakeh R. Khoury: So, a number of things brought the idea into fruition. Part of it was the interest of myself and others in going to conferences and meeting people in the same profession. Part of it was the idea that was brought up a number of years ago about having a

kind of association or society for teachers--at the time it was teachers of English, but later teachers of writing. It didn't develop into anything. At that time the idea was to have a kind of association where everybody from all over the country could join. Also, you know, the idea of having some sort of society where people could meet and exchange ideas. I thought it should be something fluid, not something like AUB training teachers at other institutions. Unfortunately, eventually it turned into that in in the last two symposiums, not because of the individuals, but because of the way people in the country view AUB. But that was not the idea at all.

We were inspired by the *Writing Research Across Borders* [conference] where they take the conference every four years to a different context. So, we were thinking of how we can do something similar and take it from one campus to the other, and I think people loved that. So, people started applying to have the symposium on their campus. Part of it was also when the director of the program at that time met with the different teachers, asking them what their dream thing was for the program, and I said, having a conference on writing. From that came the idea of this cooperation with the CTL [Center of Teaching and Learning and organizer of the *Annual International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*]. But we wanted also something on writing exclusively, and then the idea of the Symposium [came about], which is not really a conference.

The idea was to have conversations about the challenges specific to context in which we teach writing. I mean the idea of teaching writing in these multilingual contexts. The first time that we met at AUB, it was conversations, you know, just people talking to each other. And then so in the last two symposia, it was more of like a workshop setting, I don't think that is what we wanted to be honest, but it seems it was what the audience wanted. I prefer the earlier setting of having a theme, having questions and having people discuss these questions and come up with certain conclusions and maybe recommendations.

DF: So how was the symposium organized each time when it went from one university to the next? You said that people, universities applied for hosting this. If you could tell us a bit more about how the organization happened.

MRK: The first time there was a committee, and it was organized at AUB and the different members were tasked with different things to do, and the invitations were sent both by [traditional] mail and by e-mail to the different universities. There was a list of the universities, and we contacted people there. There was a big audience and at the end of the symposium the idea of holding it the following year somewhere else was brought up. It was done rather informally. We never had to formally go after people and convince them.

I thought we should have a symposium at LAU[1] and that was done through my effort. I contacted somebody there whom I'm friends with and she reciprocated. I know that she is interested in such things and she used to be a teacher at AUB. So much of it is done because of personal connections, and because people know you and trust you. And they would come because there is a name they recognize. There wasn't a formal structure [for] approaching people. Many of them were connected to AUB in one way or the other. The LAU symposium was well covered by the media. We worked with the AUB Communications Office, and they produced at different times articles about the Symposium.

DF: And from what I remember, you were involved in organizing all of those, for seven years.

MRK: From the third Symposium, which was in Balamand, I was the one following with a committee, and basically, we thought that it was important to emphasize collaboration among the institutions. So, if it was AUB and Balamand, for example, we'd have a session, where someone from [each institution] will collaborate to lead that session. And they would work together too. We would meet and agree on a general theme, and then we would think of sub themes and certain questions that the people in that session would be interested in talking about, and then people from AUB and from Balamand, they will be facilitating that session.

Yes, [we had a task team] for inter-institutional research, one for communication with the media (whether social media or conventional), one for checking or investigating, not necessarily through research, but to look into the links between what is being done in high schools, and what's being done in universities. Another task team was to look at the possibility of giving the symposium a legal status and to check with a lawyer. What needs to be done, and what framework it should be given, you know, to investigate all of these things, and of course bring it to an assembly of the Symposium to see what people think of it. There were many challenges. It takes a lot of time and takes a lot of energy of a few people, even the people who are, you know, very motivated.

Reflection

The first *Annual Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon* took place on the 9th of November 2013. Meeting minutes retrieved from emails reveal that the symposium was originally conceived as a meeting during which a representation of the teachers of writing at major universities in Lebanon with English as language of instruction would make professional contacts and generate ideas for projects to be presented at the *International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Partially then, the symposium was a means to activate the local writing teachers and populate the writing strand of the aforementioned conference, also hosted at AUB.

[1] Lebanese American University

Symposium invitations were addressed to heads of writing programs and the main text was followed by the day's program (Appendix A):

> Dear ___:
>
> We are happy to announce a Symposium on the Teaching of Writing sponsored by AUB's Communication Skills Program, which is scheduled for Saturday, 9 November 2013. We'd like to invite you and up to five other interested colleagues from your institution to participate. We envision the Symposium as an opportunity to initiate a conversation around the teaching of writing at the university level in Lebanon.
>
> We hope, also, that the conversations that begin during the Symposium will continue at AUB's 4th annual International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (7-8 February 2014; see attached CFP), which this year will have a strand devoted to writing research and pedagogy.

As the invitation clearly indicates, participation in the first symposium was solely by invitation and application. This is further confirmed by email communication among the organizing AUB committee and invitations sent to AUB writing program, inviting writing instructors to send their preferences for a full day attendance or guest role, the former of which was subject to confirmation and "understood as professional commitment to attending", while the latter as participation in opening, lunch, and closing remarks (L. Arnold[2], personal communication, October 29, 2013). The final guest list revealed fifty-one participants from eight universities, and twenty-seven additional AUB guests joining for the opening and closing remarks and lunch. In its later iterations, the symposium indeed became open to all interested writing professionals, but at its inception participation was limited to program leadership and a few select faculty members. Existing documents do not explain whether such limitations were dictated by limited funds or other considerations.

In the responses above, Khoury specifies being "inspired by the *Writing Research Across Borders* [conference] where they take the conference every four years to a different context. So, we were thinking of how we can do something similar and take it from one campus to the other." Described this way, the symposium is recast as a "best practice" imported to Lebanon *because it works well elsewhere*. In other words, we – the broader community but also the three authors as active participants in the symposium effort – transported "the what" before we were able to ascertain that this transported activity would align with "the local why." In his 1986 editor's introduction to *Research in the Teaching of English*, Applebee warned against expecting activities to thrive in

[2] Lisa Arnold directed the Communication Skills Program at AUB in 2013 and chaired the SIG that organized the 1st Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon.

contexts they were not originally intended for. Reflecting on teaching but in ways relevant to our discussion here, Applebee writes:

> This process of taking from the new approach often – perhaps even usually – preserves the form of the approach, but is equally likely to subvert the original purpose, unless the original purpose is well understood. If we truly understand why a particular approach is working, on the other hand, it is quite possible it will be successfully implemented in new contexts, without incorporating any of the "model" activities at all – if the functions of the original activities can be better served by other activities in the teachers' repertoires. (p. 6)

Applebee's words invite us to reflect on Symposium's purpose and form and thus dictate our reading of available archival documents relating to the event. In reviewing them, we *both* seek a documented theoretical expression of local needs *and* analyze the event's format for how our purpose – articulated or not – manifested itself through form. Does evidence exist that we, as members of the organizing committee, paid attention to the principles underlying our actions? Did we adhere to what Dippre (2024) calls *principled practice* or "decision making that is informed by values, by expertise in the field, and by the particular needs of the contexts" (p. 15)? In today's reflection upon the event, both its origins and development over six iterations, we find little evidence of an articulated and widely accepted set of principles (or, maybe more accurately, a recognition that what we share are in fact such principles) that would have allowed the event to respond more systematically and transparently to a local or locally formulated need. The closest we came were "symposium notes" (Appendix B) and minutes (Appendix C), which were shared with the community once via the listserv after the second symposium in 2014 and thus could have been the basis for a common articulation of local principles.

Today, it may look like a missed opportunity. For as we aimed to transport an inspiring practice, we overlooked the importance of transforming it into a "principled practice" (Dippre, 2024), one responsive to values expressed by local teaching community. Indeed, the first symposium emphasized learning about each other and making future plans that would reflect and respond to the local conditions. To that end, a brief program survey was created and all eight participating universities completed it with basic program information to better understand labor and learning conditions within the separate writing programs or units. Also, the Symposium's minutes (Appendix 2) are a seven-page document with details of programs' needs, visions, and future directions as specified by its participants. Interestingly, offering workshops for teachers of writing is in the minutes, as is inviting school representatives. As an activity system then, the symposium began with decisions taken by a group of nine main organizers, and over the six following years, developed to both more accurately represent the needs of community members whose actions it mediated and to broaden the community itself. At no point, however, was there a conscious, collective effort to name the emerging principles underlying the activity (Applebee, 1986; Dippre, 2024) and expressing the will of the whole community (Palmquist et al., 2012).

Language of Instruction

DF: Whom did you want to involve? And what do you understand this community to be? Who do you think the community is made up of? What kinds of teachers?

MRK: Originally, we thought of teachers of writing that teach these foundation courses similar to the courses in the Communication Skills Program[3]. So we're thinking of these general requirement courses that work on students' writing. We didn't think of people who teach creative writing, or who teach writing in the disciplines. Then because of the discussion of the challenges, people started talking about what we need to teach and what we need to unteach. And maybe students are not well prepared because some students come, and they deal well with certain learning objectives and [not] others. Most of the students in universities in Lebanon come from high schools in Lebanon and they come from programs like the Lebanese Baccalaureate, the International Baccalaureate or the French Baccalaureate. So that's in line with the idea of that, we are teaching in a multilingual context because some students come after having studied all the lives in French. Also, maybe a small percentage would have studied most of their lives in Arabic and have taken English only as a subject on its own, not used it as a medium of instruction. So there, there was all this variation that needed to be taken into account. So, it is really a mixture. I mean, the community would be a mixture of the teachers who teach writing and composition in these foundation courses. And the teachers called, you know, English teachers in high schools. Many of our students have English as their home language, others have Arabic as their home language, but also others have Armenian as their home language. So, all of these elements make the context different from other contexts and maybe requires I don't know different approaches to what is being used in in North America, or you know other contexts.

When LAU was involved our contact person there had a very good connection with the Ministry of Education. So, we started involving the Ministry of Education. and they kind of expected to have their teachers come and get professional development. I thought it was worth involving teachers from public schools, because we need to understand what's happening in the high school exit classes to understand what's happening in our classes at the university. So, we started inviting teachers of English who teach exit classes in public schools, through the Ministry, and a few private schools through personal contacts. The attendance grew from like 80 people to I think at one point we became 120, or 130 participants, which is a big number, if you think of Lebanon, and the community we are targeting.

[3] Communication Skills Program is the name of first-year composition program at AUB.

Reflection

This response is interesting because a question about who the teachers are leads not to a description of high-school and university teacher identities but rather a particular common reality that they operate in -- "a multilingual context" (Khoury), or highly complex sociolinguistic space which sees the Lebanese switch not only between their native Arabic and second languages, typically French and/or English, but also between the low-variety of spoken, colloquial Lebanese Arabic and the high-variety of Modern Standard Arabic (Bahous et al., 2014), or heritage languages, such as Armenian. In educational context, the essence of such a linguistic complexity seems to reside in the phrase *language of instruction* (LOI). It is easy to gloss over the term as familiar and prima facie well understood. D. Wagner and Hedidar (2023) however, offer an eye-opening LOI overview which counters this apparent simplicity and unpacks some of the complex social realities the term can signify and many of which are mirrored in the local realities, some of which were in fact acknowledged during the 2014 Symposium themed "Creating cultures of research: Studying writing contexts in Lebanon." According to the minutes (Appendix C), participants of small brainstorming groups raised three relevant questions: (1) Define context in Lebanon? What does that mean? (Code-switching, language etc.), (2) Importance of different student backgrounds in French, English or Arabic schools and learning styles, and (3) How does Arabic contribute to the learning of English as a 'positive' thing? (ibid.) And yet, such deeper questions underlying the ongoing debates on English as language of instruction have yet to be explored by the local writing community[4]. Indeed, an online search for records of scholarly conversation with keyword combination of ("language of instruction" AND "higher education" AND Lebanon) yields barely 10 results, only four of which are authored by people with local-sounding names and thus promise to offer an emic perspective, three were published in the 1990s – so three decades ago – and with no record of being cited or otherwise taken up by later studies, while one was commissioned by the World Bank.

We extend Khoury's recognition of the incredibly complex multilingual reality as an invitation to engage in research-based inquiry that could support the teaching community with relevant scholarship. Local writing instructors and writing scholars have much to add to existing discussions on literacy in the language of former colonizers as strategies for unification and development of nations (Williams, 2006), rejection of standardization in favor of "developing the flexibility to use a range of registers in multiple contexts" (Goodman & Goodman, 2006, p. 347), foreign language curricula as a mechanism of interpellation or a process in which people learn to identify with the culture of the former colonizers (Hickling-Hudson, 2010), the role of language in engaging students intellectually and emotionally in discussions on memorializing a nation's past and reflecting on cultural-historic perspectives (S. Wagner & Hoecherl-Alden, 2020), or issues of access and socio-economic mobility and stability that sometimes manifest in resistance to mother-tongue instruction (D. Wagner & Hedidar, 2023). We know firsthand that questions of sociocultural shifts brought

[4] Remaining annual symposia were themed: 3rd Academic integrity in the Lebanese context. Issues and challenges, 4th Writing assessment, 5th Technology and writing across the curriculum, and 6th Writing research.

about by schooling in language of instruction different from the society's native language remains among the most important considerations for the teachers of academic writing in Lebanon who continue to navigate this complex reality of competing language needs on daily basis.

Fluid Genres and Shifting Communities

Amy Zenger: That brings me [back] to the 1st symposium. There were people from different institutions, but they knew each other in different ways. Maybe they went to school together, or they were related through their families or through marriage. I just thought that was interesting. It was a new way of collaborating, but the people themselves weren't always completely new to each other.

MRK: We're not new to each other. You're right. Many of the contact people in other universities were AUB graduates, previously worked at AUB, or had some sort of connection with AUB. Many of the participants turned out to be AUB graduates or have some sort of connection with AUB. The Symposium events were good networking opportunities, and some used them as opportunities to try to get a job at AUB and other institutions. But yeah, I see for it a potential to make it. Because even, you know, over six symposia it was still growing. I think it didn't take its final shape, the shape that we wanted for it, which is making it as a get together to talk about issues related to teaching, writing, and composition in this multilingual context, in -- I don't know how to describe Lebanon -- in a third world country outside the northern hemisphere. And I tried after each symposium to ask people in the Core Organizing Committee to send reflections. Not many send their reflections. Not many thought about it. Some did, but not everyone.

AZ: Yes. If it were training, then it should take a different shape.

MRK: That's how I see it. But you know, I don't want it to be just, you know: "Come, we'll train you." These are workshops. There was no committee to say, "You can say this. You can't say this" because we felt it should be open, and people would put ideas on the table, and others would, you know, reciprocate and respond to them. But if it turns into training, then maybe there should be a committee to look at the quality of these workshops.

AZ: I understand that it was hard to maintain the organization and to continue to do it. But people did attend. So, what's your sense about what they needed from it, or what they wanted to get from it?

MRK: I think getting in contact with people from other institutions would open people's eyes to things maybe they were not aware of. You will notice things that maybe have never crossed your mind. Contact and the exchange would open your eyes to things that I think will impact one's

teaching and one's design of courses, not design of the course, but what could one include, or take into account when talking to students coming from different contexts, and so on. But, like I said before, many of the teachers expected a kind of workshop setting where they will come to take a certificate that they have attended a workshop. So that was what they wanted, some of them, not everybody.

AZ: Having a symposium makes sense when you're an instructor who has the ability to shape your course to some extent, or to choose different aspects, even if you're not just creating it from scratch. But I think some in some institutions where the syllabus is fixed that isn't the case. So, attending a meeting like the Symposium would become like, how can I deliver this syllabus better, but it isn't about how can I rethink what I'm doing, or how can I come up with a new assignment that I've never tried before? So, people would have a different range of possibilities in terms of what they're allowed to do as instructors. I would guess.

MRK: Yes, true. Even in our program, there are certain assignments that have to be more or less the same across different sections, because the expectation is that if a student takes section 1 of English 203 their experience should be more or less similar to taking section 29. But within the major assignment there will be different ways of approaching it. So, attending the symposium and talking about this, maybe we'll give people ideas about how to approach it in different ways. I remember, for example, at one of the sessions at the Hariri University Symposium related to socially engaged learning and community-based learning somebody came to me and said, "I never knew that you could have a rubric for an assignment like that."

Reflection

Today, we also find it helpful to reflect on symposium as a genre. Our guiding questions include: What exactly did we aim to transport from other localities? Specifically, what limitations and affordances came with our understanding of symposium that its organizers were working from? Upon closer inspections, the genre of symposium reveals no rigid style, form, or content of academic exchange but a fluid construct adapted to each iteration of the event.

Discourse studies confirm that genres are fluid, change over time, and are continually co-constructed and transformed by all active members of discourse communities. That meanings are always situated, "grounded in actual practices and experiences" (Gee, 2003, p. 53), and therefore depend on specific contexts of use. And that genres, as concepts that are not only cognitive but also social, must imply variation brought about by the diverse community membership (Hyland, 2008) which depend on them to mediate activity. Such an ongoing co-construction comes to full view when we observe gradual shifts of form and function over time in six writing symposia. What all six had in common were speeches by experts and food. But on closer inspection, even the speeches evolved, and only food breaks remained unchanged. In the first year, speeches were made by individual program leaders to tell stories of writing instruction at their universities, and themed

discussions took place at round tables which emphasized the flat hierarchy among mixed groups of discussants and whose results were reported back to the whole gathering by table representatives. As years progressed, participation became open to all interested community members, and the event was hosted by new co-organizers who each had a say in how the symposium was organized and which or whose needs it spoke to. The structure began to shift towards a key address by an invited speaker-expert, followed by a series of simultaneous theme-based 20-minute presentations by community members deemed by the organizers to possess enough expertise for the task, with hands-on, workshop-style participant involvement and free-flowing conversations. Participants were free to choose from among the consecutive sessions. Conversations continued and new acquaintances were made over lunch sponsored by each host university.

This evolution of form is interesting insofar as it shows how even in the absence of articulated principles, the local writing community was able to modify an imported "best practice" and adapt it to the needs and expectations of a (different) real time and a (different) real place. And how making the event more inclusive and thus larger necessitated a change of form. Round table discussions became unrealistic, and reporting back on the separate discussions to the whole gathering was forced out of the schedule by dwindling interest. And while community response reshaped the form in an organic way, the new form began to afford new ways of engagement previously unplanned for by the original group of organizers. The theme of change expressed by Khoury in "I don't think that is what we wanted to be honest, but it seems it was what the audience wanted" returns on several occasions throughout the interview – and it does so with a hint of regret that the organizers were not able to convince the audience to keep the original form.

Support and Materiality

DF: I wonder about the material support. Has it always been a question of forging those connections and kind of creating support? Or are there any existing structures or mechanisms of support in terms of money, space, anything? Or was it something that you had to create and work for?

MRK: When you know, it has to come from the institutions. If you're asking about AUB, you know that if we need a budget, we need to apply ahead of time. And there are limited sources. And we need to think ahead of time about what we're going to do and apply in time. And then whoever it is that takes the decision will decide whether our project gets priority over other projects, and so on. And for the budget of the first symposium, if I remember correctly, it came from the budget of the Communication Skills Program. It covered stationery, renting the room in West Hall, and the sandwiches that we offered the participants. The other symposia were funded by the institutions that were hosting the events on their campuses. They even sent transportation to AUB and participants who were leaving from AUB vicinity.

DF: Do you have any materials, a budding archive of the symposium?

MRK: Yes, I have a folder with the abstracts and the article that the Communication Office wrote, and what we used to have on our website.

AZ: Did you at the time also share things with the Archives Department in Jafet Library about the Symposium?

MRK: No, it didn't. I mean interesting idea. It didn't occur to me to do that. But I think I still have material between my laptop and my computer in the office. I have a lot of material like the posters and it's a good idea to keep these records in the Archives Department in Jafet Library. Originally, the idea and one of the targets for the Symposium was to develop a kind of database for publications by people who teach writing and composition in Lebanese institutions. But first you need people to collaborate and to produce something. So, the idea of inter-institution collaboration was the essence. The whole point is to create an atmosphere of exchanges and communication about teaching of writing in Lebanon's multilingual and complex context taking its idiosyncrasies into account, but not necessarily ending up with answers and solutions; rather, or at least, identifying and asking the right and needed questions. As Voltaire says: "Judge a [person] by his questions rather than by his answers."

Of course, we can draw on the repertoire of knowledge and experience of teaching writing and composition in other contexts, especially in the US. However, the idiosyncrasies of the Lebanese context must be considered because one could learn something from other contexts, but certain elements will be missing and would not help to understand all the intricacies of teaching writing in Lebanon (as mentioned earlier given the special model of multilingualism).

Reflection

In her response, Khoury lists an application for financial support, a conference room, stationery, and snacks. We can thus imagine the electronic pathways these documents travel as they are circulating in due process of securing permissions, roads and highways the organizers travel to meet their counterparts in other universities, the paths they walk and stairs they negotiate to ensure that conference rooms are fitted with appropriate tables and a specific number of chairs, a podium, audio-visual system, or that the air conditioning is working and food stays fresh. What we conclude through our reflection fueled by our imagining of the physicality of those processes is that it is the symposium itself that emerges as the central material activity of our local community of practice. Pieced together from other relevant material support accessible to organizers at their respective organizing universities, it is the symposium that gives substance to the mental activities and professional needs of the group in question. As we follow this line of thinking, we remember other attempts to maintain the material status of the group: The first symposium was tweeted (the handle no longer exists today), a LinkedIn group was created (with forty-four participants but inactive

today), and a listserv was set up with the goal of creating access to the community and invigorating scholarly activity.

Material foundations have then been laid not just for sustained cooperation but also for the decentering of power and authority with the community. It is within those structures that individual community members were encouraged to mentor each other and maintain the momentum through email exchanges and discussions, update reports on the achievements of several SIG groups created in the wake of the first symposium (groups whose specific charges we cannot recall today but whose echoes we recognize throughout Khoury's narrative), and together build a robust support system "to take advantage of opportunities for sharing experiences with community and scientific audiences" (Teufel et al., 2019, p. 3). But – if these community structures are to fulfill their function – they need to be continually repopulated and made active use of. Novice participants need scaffolds, modeled interaction, and access to scholarship to progress from periphery to active center of a community and the professional expertise it symbolizes. And that type of leadership – possibly enacted within individual writing programs at separate universities (Toth & Sullivan, 2016) – has been insufficient or missing altogether.

Recognizing that these material structures did not work as intended, organizers of the 7th symposium set to convene at the American University of Beirut were brainstorming alternative ways of community engagement and hoping to organize an event more accurately aligned with the intellectual activities and professional needs of the group in question. The reflective and more welcoming spirit was reflected in the agreed theme for the 2020 Symposium, "Writing for a More Inclusive World."

Original and Future Plan

AZ: It's good to recognize and remember what's happened, because I can see how [when] you're working, you become invested in what you're doing and you create things. And then new people come in and they don't know anything about it, it just fades. They don't pick it up and carry it further. So, it's really nice to make sure that things build on each other. And that what happened gets recognized and continued.

MRK: We were thinking, before Covid, that the following symposium would be number seven, at AUB. We thought seven is a nice number to bring it back to AUB. And we talked about whether it would make sense to have it online or not. And we thought the essence of it is to have people sit together and talk in person and have lunch together in a celebratory ambiance and exchange different experiences and opinions. Maybe we should prepare for next year and apply for funding for next year to have it in person. I feel that we should continue with it. We need funds for stationery, for the location, because we don't have a big room in our program, and we needed to offer participants some food. Sharing the food, I think, is an important part of this

gathering because it brings people together over something nice, like it is a celebration of our profession and of our getting together. You know. Sometimes you think that you're doing something new, if you like. One has access to what has been done before they could continue. Instead of starting from scratch, and they could build on what was done before.

AZ: And respect the work that has happened. This has been so rich. I'm really, really happy to have this conversation. So, thank you so much, Malakeh.

MRK: Thank you so much.

DF: Thank you.

Invitation to Archive and Build Local Expertise

Belonging to a professional community of practice centers on "doing things together," on engagement (Wenger, 2000, p. 227). In our conversation, we record six years of history of an annual event we found to be important for building a community of practice of teachers of writing in Lebanese universities. In our reflections, we point to what we see as important considerations in nurturing the self-perception of writing teachers as members of a viable community of practice, an egalitarian one, with as flat a structure as possible, one in which things are in fact done *together* and leading to the collective articulation of local principles, contexts, and related expertise. In the year the symposium was suspended, the date was set, funds were secured, and its organizers hoped to address a future format that would best sustain the community. What models of organization exist that suit a grassroots movement like ours? What formats support inter-university cooperation? What trade-offs must we reckon with within formal, government-sponsored syndicates versus informal associations driven by the sheer willpower of its members? How does the specificity of the Lebanese context influence those considerations? In essence, what structure would make the symposium a relevant activity within the learning community and help it sustain its sense of purpose and long-term functioning?

The interview discloses a certain tension between the imagined and actual ways of participating which, upon reflection, may point the way forward. While the organizers, most of whom occupy important positions in their respective writing programs, wanted to see all participants engage in equal exchange, a large group of the participants appeared to view the symposium as an opportunity to learn quietly and passively, rather than discuss actively, or to seek future employment, rather than bring expertise back to their institutions. Recognizing this tension opens space for acknowledging a perceived hierarchy within the community, which – in the absence of sustained professional development – may block movement from novice's periphery to expert's center. Recognizing the tension also opens up space for exploring how writing is taught, how writing instructors' work is organized, and how instructors are managed across the various institutions in Lebanon. If participants seek workshops, is this because they lack sufficient opportunities in their

own institutions? If they express interest in attendance certificates, is this because certificates, rather than empowered voices, are valued by their employers? How do writing program coordinators or directors encourage professional development that shapes attitudes towards the symposium as one of the events within the community of practice? What is and is not done to help practitioners progress from the periphery into the center of the community and claim expertise (Cabusao et al., 2019)? What are the separate institutional contexts which programs navigate and how do they function? And, finally, how are programs conceptualized: as managerial units, or as teams of experts at different stages of self-realization? In this sense, the symposium emerges almost as a provocation for self-reflection.

In sharing this conversation and our reflections with the readers of *MENA Writing Studies Journal*, we wish to invite other local voices to join in creating what Ritter calls collective memory (Ritter, 2018), including archiving related events or program experiences that grew from individual participation in the symposium. Of course, the process of recognizing and recording local writing endeavors cannot be complete without including other forms of engagement in the local community of writing teachers. This interview is a beginning. We believe there are many more stories waiting to be told by other co-organizers and participants of the symposium, stories about how this event helped position their programs or influence the visibility of writing on their campuses, how it fit or did not fit into their multilingual realities, about drawing on material support offered by academic units, how the conversations helped share writing instructors' daily pedagogical practices, highlighted their professional sense of self, identity, direction, and their sense of belonging in the community, as well as many more.

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Appendix A

Program for the First Symposium on the Teaching of Writing

Symposium on the Teaching of Writing

hosted by the Communication Skills Program
at the American University of Beirut

9 November 2013
West Hall, Auditorium B

Coffee (9-9:30am)

Introductions (9:30-10:15a): Dr. David Wrisley, Chair of English at AUB, will introduce the Symposium. Each program represented at the Symposium will give a 5-minute presentation that provides an overview of the program's history, relevant facts (enrollment, number of full-time instructors, etc.), types of courses taught, and the recurrent questions or concerns about teaching that arise for program administration and faculty.

Program Needs (10:30a-12:00p): Participants will work in small groups to outline the overlapping and diverse needs of each program represented. Afterwards, each group will summarize its discussion for the seminar participants.

Lunch (12:00-1:00p)

Program Visions (1:00-2:30p): Participants will work in small groups to outline the shared and differing visions of each program represented. Afterwards, each group will summarize its discussion for the seminar participants.

Coffee Break (2:30-3:00p)

Conclusion – Where to Go from Here (3:00-4:30p): Participants will consider various options and opportunities for future collaboration, in an effort to promote a mutually beneficial conversation around, and support for, the teaching of writing at universities across Lebanon.

Appendix B

Email Correspondence of Meeting Minutes

Twitter: @AUBCommSkills
Symposium: #STW2013

Minutes of the 2013 Symposium on the Teaching of Writing by Nicole Khoury, Assistant Professor, Department of English, AUB

Session 1: Mapping Our Programs' Needs

Needs of our programs from the perspectives of students, faculty members, administration, facilities, university and program policies, resources, inter- and intra-departmental relationships:

1. Administration/University and Program policies:
   a. Support and empathy from administration, colleagues, and university community
   b. Clarification of Learning Outcomes
   c. Transparency when assigning courses
   d. Need to understand the value of our writing programs
   e. Understanding the effects of financial pressure
2. Facilities
   a. Flexible spaces for faculty development, cross-disciplinary coordination
   b. Providing facilities
   c. Ensuring working facilities for instruction
   d. Technology enhanced classrooms
   e. Writing support: through Writing Center or other centers or facilities
   f. Access to online databases and research facilities
   g. Technological (IT) support for instructors
3. Students:
   a. How to engage, motivate (and entertain) students
   b. Approaches to grade-oriented university culture
   c. Need to learn how to learn: attention to information literacy
   d. How to make connections between their past and present education and various styles of learning; ensuring there is a relevance and promoting the relevance of writing
   e. Awareness of cultural difference
   f. Placement
   g. Awareness of real-world writing situations
   h. Rethinking assignments for students
   i. Autonomous learning practices in university

   j. Addressing "remedial" work and approaches
   k. Supporting students within the university: including health care centers, acknowledging students' personal situations
   l. Student aid
   m. Transparent grading practices and assessment
4. Teachers:
   a. Awareness of cultural differences of students
   b. Need to develop "best practices" for teaching writing
   c. Manageable workload for writing instructors, including consideration for course-load, caps on courses, etc.
   d. Job security, mobility within the university, salaries
   e. Providing coaching and mentoring to faculty; Peer coaching
   f. "Native vs. Non-Native" gap/dichotomy needs to be addressed
   g. Constant revision of writing courses; self-reflection of teaching pedagogies
5. Inter- and intra-departmental relationships
   a. Development of faculty across campus, involving faculty in professional development communities
   b. Dialogue between teachers of writers and various faculty across campus
   c. Addressing issues of plagiarism
   d. WAC: Incorporating writing across the university curriculum
   e. Providing support for teachers across the university to incorporate writing in their courses
   f. Providing opportunities for part-time and full-time faculty to meet
   g. Need for more full-time faculty
   h. Support from cultural centers
6. Writing Programs across Lebanon
   a. Cooperation and collaboration across universities and writing programs (instead of competition)

Session 2: Mapping Our Programs' Visions

Visions for the future of our programs addressing the needs of students, faculty members, administration, facilities, university and program policies, resources, inter- and intra-departmental relationships:

1. Administration/University and Program policies
   a. Standardized assessment for instructors
   b. Standardized syllabi and/or learning outcomes

c. Transparency of course outcomes
d. Updating writing instruction curriculum
e. Improve admission criteria
f. Faculty work load/ pay/ benefits
g. Mini English departments across Lebanon
h. Address writing in schools
i. Reciprocity of allegiance to the university
j. Implementing standards for admissions
k. Continuous support and constructive feedback through professional learning communities across faculties
l. Writing Across the Curriculum: developing support thorough student experiences
m. Support for smaller class sizes
n. Autonomy for programs to direct student placement
o. Administrative support for collaboration between writing instructors and instructors from various disciplines
p. Empowering instructors to reach our goals
q. Authentic assessment of program goals and implementation

2. Facilities
   a. Highlight continuous training for teachers and students in technology
   b. Making/creating our own textbooks
   c. Providing Writer Center support for students
   d. Technology-enhanced classrooms
   e. Self-access English labs
   f. Providing resources for students; encourage an egalitarian approach to resources
   g. Ability to order books for personal use
   h. Access to internet, books, libraries
   i. Maintenance of facilities
   j. Bridging and supporting online collaborations between departments (including blogs, social media, etc.)
   k. Logistical issues: Classroom size
3. Students
   a. Engaged teaching and learning
   b. Creating a social contract
   c. Creating rubrics
   d. Transfer of skills to other disciplines
   e. Creating spaces for students to write/read and share their writing
   f. Informing students about social issues to foster understanding
   g. Providing opportunities for students to write for real audiences (visibility of student writing)

   h. Making courses relevant to student needs
   i. See themselves as autonomous learners
   j. Provide international exchange programs
   k. Work in parallel with international programs
   l. Community-based topics
   m. "Make English Cool" by providing opportunities for students to develop writing
   n. Motivation for writing; Address students' personal goals
   o. Encourage their native tongue and multilingualism
   p. Global citizens
   q. Opportunities to connect the classroom with the real-world; meeting students' needs; address accuracy vs. fluency
4. Teachers
   a. Faculty development and workshops
   b. Include literature in curriculum
   c. In-house training for faculty members
   d. Off-campus retreats
   e. Access to state-of-the-art technology
   f. Less teacher-centered classroom; more autonomous learners and confidence in their range of language skills
   g. Envision teachers as good citizens, contributing to the teaching community as a whole
   h. Contributing as writers
   i. Addressing approaches to plagiarism and its relationship to writing; theorizing plagiarism
5. Inter- and intra-departmental relationships
   a. Increased collaboration
   b. Establishing lasting liaisons with other departments
   c. Creating focus group: writing instructors, instructors from other disciplines, and students across the university
   d. Providing support for writing in other disciplines faculty from various disciplines
   e. Increased collaborative teaching with faculty from various disciplines
   f. Implementing an ESP course in each faculty
6. Writing programs across Lebanon
   a. Developing community-based topics and assignments that encourage universities to work together
   b. Foster collaborations across universities
   c. Visibility on the global map of teaching writing

Conclusion: Where Do We Go from Here?

Key words:

- Collaboration
- Communication: communicate with administrators (rhetoric)
- Communities: online, outside the university, learning comm.
- Culture: understanding the culture of the students and the university
- Value: ways instructors can be valued, value of languages
- Motivation: student, teacher motivation, engagement in teaching and learning
- Accountability
- Bridges & Transfer

- TESOL Lebanon: Association of University-Level English Faculty in Lebanon
- Informal learning community among faculty across universities that encourage research, collaboration between faculty in conferences
- Think tank
- Teachers Blogging
- Digital Archives for Literacy Narratives
- Highlighting and administrative support for student talent
- Links between universities and schools
- Offering writing workshops for teachers of writing
- Collaboration across universities focused on community-based learning and assignments
- Spaces for students to come together and write across universities
- Involve policy-makers local or national
- Requesting assessment from graduates, include them in the conversation
- Making our work visible to the university
- Ask for financial support
- LinkedIn Online Group
- Invite universities to events on campus
- Sharing the process: custom published books, Writing Center development, pedagogy, etc.
- Inviting faculty from various disciplines to discuss the importance of writing
- Continued efforts to sustain the Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon (also invite school representatives)

Appendix C

Minutes of The Second Annual Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon

December 6th 2014

Creating Cultures of Research: Studying Writing Contexts in Lebanon

Universities Attending the Symposium: NDU, Balamand, LIU, LAU, AUB, Hagazian

Introduction:

Malake Khoury

Speaks briefly about the question of exchanging knowledge on the teaching of writing across the country and the region

Lisa Arnold

- Reflects on last year's symposium in order to create new contexts
- Concluded on a need for dialogue and collaboration through intra-institutional support
- We did not talk about research in particular. What is this, in context? Lisa speaks of her background in order to clarify this dimension in the discussion (includes assessment, research in the classroom, curriculum development, how to achieve the goals of the university, the teaching of writing as content and ideas through showcasing evidence in student writing)
- Larger need for research beyond institutional research is to introduce practices of research and teaching across the globe, and to international researchers who know little about literacy practices in the MENA region
- We need to articulate these research questions as a group in Lebanon

Small Group Brainstorming:

Group one:

- Involvement of students in these discussions and symposiums
- Define context in Lebanon? What does that mean? (Code-switching, language etc)
- What is the nature of interest in writing practices by MENA and international researchers
- Different cultural backgrounds of students in one class?
- How does social media affect student interest in writing? How does it contrast to traditional methods?
- Raise awareness with other departments on campus about writing practices/increase culture of writing (testing vs writing as assessment)
- Redefine writing as rhetoric not only grammar

- Student voices on writing, what are they? From various universities
- Assessment of the writing program – are we doing what we think we're doing?

Group two:

- Request for organizers (minutes to be sent to entire community of the symposium)
- Building on last year's thoughts – need to address lack of resources/support
- Why are writing courses not taken seriously?
- "Blame" towards writing teachers – why?
- Need to know more about our diverse context across Lebanon
- What are the attitudes across the region or inter-lebanon (city vs peripheries of the country)
- Why negative attitude (who is the audience, economic and cultural differences)
- What is the relevance of what we teach to their careers – how to bring this across to students?
- Possibilities: create a larger symposium to include highschool teachers
- Wider discussion (maybe social events)
- Limitations: teachers are overwhelmed with too much work, little pay J
- Encourage culture of research (how does learning take place, why should I as a student even bother?)
- We lack confidence in the value of what we have to say in this part of the world

Group three:

- Difference in proficiency levels
- Need motivation and inspiration in the student body
- Giving students enough freedom in terms of writing topics
- Teachers need to explain purpose and context of what is being taught
- Teachers can discuss pros and cons of norming sessions (assessment techniques)
- Grading, topic for teacher discussion (subjectivity vs objectivity)
- Experience in the classroom, how it affects grading and method transparency
- Good to have feedback by other teachers at other institutions
- Internal conversations at our own institutions (with students too)
- English writing brought into the curriculum at institutions that are introducing writing practices
- Evaluation as a topic to share and discuss

Group four:

- Teaching of writing needs more PR
- Establish an understanding of the relevancy of writing to other teachers across the discipline

- Importance of understanding learning practices in schools vs university
- Importance of different student backgrounds in French, English or Arabic schools and learning styles
- How does Arabic contribute to the learning of English as a 'positive' thing?
- Need to incorporate more reading exposure
- Are we being more lenient as teachers to accommodate students?
- What are the knowledge gaps?
- How to enlist social media in our courses?
- Show relevancy of the practice of writing in life
- Can pursue these questions in symposiums, research, publications

Group five:

- Is writing thinking, or thinking through writing?
- Create more context driven assignments beyond academia into 'real life'
- Provide a real audience for student writing
- How to transfer knowledge from one course to another by students
- Perception of language as a commodity
- Ethical practices in writing (ex: sourcing)

Group six:

- Learning goals, are they transparent amongst teachers?
- What we mean by teaching writing, what are the different scenarios?
- Create forums in order to expose ourselves to scholarship plus our own experiences that are unique
- Real political situations that prevent us to talk to each other in our different institutions

Whole Group Discussion

Discussion is based on individual teachers, institutions and across institutions
What do teachers need to know about their classroom (and larger) setting?

Individual teachers:

- Physical classroom setting not inductive to writing workshops
- Classical seating that are upsetting
- More incentive for individual teachers are good websites such as "the teaching professor" newsletter
- We need extra ideas about our teaching

- Instead of looking at information outside, we ought to conduct our own research, and blend with existing knowledge
- Observation and sharing between teachers
- Role model via experience and innovative methodology
- Attend to the psychological aspect of teaching (what do students want to learn, really?)
- Student-input in teaching methods ought to be welcome by teachers
- Teachers ought to study the classroom setting via research in a continuous manner
- Teacher-research needs major recognition as incentive
- Need space to share our expertise/research such as linked-in or list serves
- Example: AUB has support group/action research group (sig) that discusses things like using humor in the classroom, discuss papers, invite speakers
- Do teachers have time to do this research?
- Is there institutional funding to support this research?
- Is there a possibility for cross-institutional research?

Institutions (role of/benefit from our work)

- Teachers persuade the institution through evidence, good results, credibility
- Not considered as 'primary researchers' by the institution, a challenge to address
- We are experts at what we do, but we tend to be too pragmatic by not looking at our own development as experts in writing
- Case-studies by teachers of writing not regarded as 'scientific research' by institutions
- Build awareness amongst administrators about these points
- Do we need to convince institutions? Support comes through money or coaching or resources
- Or we need to strongly publish, and produce case studies to convince the administration – we need to get there in the qualitative research/culture of recognition
- Connect our (teaching) values to those of the administrators and the university
- Some students move to another institution because it's " easier" – therefore, institutions benefit from just numbers of enrollment
- Start good research on Lebanon and the practice of writing – to achieve more recognition for our field
- Is this a world-wide concern? Not only in Lebanon?

Support and methods across the institution

- Invest in a space in the public to raise awareness about the practice of writing
- Create a research product/paper at the end of this conference as tangible result
- Need for collegiality

- Why is there non-constructive competition between institutions and between colleagues?
- Should there be more security and support for teachers so they don't feel threatened about their job position?

Next Steps/Practical Measures

- Online forum for sharing knowledge
- Funding across universities – fellowships
- Regular meetings for updates on work
- Include high school instructors
- Re-think our writing curricula
- Collaborative research projects (start things up electronically to brainstorm topics)
- Ex: collecting data from courses/students regarding curricula/learning outcomes
- Follow-up on practical projects for us as a community of teachers
- Link up to library for resourcing
- Calendar of events open to the public

Task teams are generated during the discussion. List of names and team leaders to follow (see Lisa for details)

End of Symposium

Dorota Fleszar teaches first-year composition at the American University of Beirut. She has five years of experience as writing program administrator and co-organizer of the annual Symposium on the Teaching of Writing in Lebanon and the International Conference on Effective Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. She currently serves on the editorial board of the MENA Writing Studies Journal. Dorota is a doctoral candidate in the Composition and Applied Linguistics program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests center on theories and pedagogies of reading and writing program administration.

Amy Zenger is the Chair of the Institute for Liberal Arts at American University of Beirut – Mediterraneo. Between 2004 and 2023, she served as assistant professor and associate professor in the Department of English at the American University of Beirut, focusing on writing programs and the teaching of writing. Her research interests include transnational writing program administration; literacy; visuality; and critical race theory in writing studies. She obtained her PhD in rhetoric and composition at the University of New Hampshire.

Malakeh R. Khoury is an instructor of academic and technical writing in the Communication Skills Program, Department of English at the American University of Beirut. She has been serving as the

director of the program since 2022 and served before that as the assistant director of the same program. She earned her BA in English Literature and MA in English Language from the American University of Beirut. She completed all the coursework for a Doctor of Education in TESOL with the University of Leicester, UK. Her research interests are mainly in language and writing, cross-border literacies, and translingualism.

Submissions

We accept rolling submissions for full length articles, think pieces, book reviews, literacy narratives, and interviews. Please refer to the Guidelines for Submission to submit appropriately formatted documents with the cover sheet to menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb.

MENA-related writing studies research

We are interested in timely empirical research, theory, and praxis regarding writing in the region. While submissions are published in English, we invite articles discussing the theory and instruction of writing studies of any language in the region, at all education levels.

We accept full-length article manuscripts (7,000 words including references) and think pieces (3,500 words including references).

Book reviews

Book reviews of MENA region and global texts fitting the aims and scope of this journal, including multilingual texts on linguistics, composition, multiple literacies, and various ages are encouraged (1,000 to 1,500 words to review a single text and 3,000 to 3,500 to review multiple texts in conversation).

Translingual, transnational literacy narratives

We invite literacy narratives from both students and scholars highlighting the linguistic and composing processes engendered by translingual and transnational sponsors (up to 7,000 words).

Interviews

We encourage anyone working on initiatives that contribute to the goals of furthering collaboration, education, or research in the region–whether small or large scale, inside their classes or beyond–to engage in interviews. (If you or someone you know is doing this kind of work, interview them!)

To document the unique work conducted in each writing program, we publish interviews of faculty, staff, and administrators with innovative writing studies and faculty development projects (7,000 words).

News and Events

MENAWCA will be hosted at NYU Abu Dhabi from 9 to 12 October 2025. Writing center personnel from across the region will discuss their writing center's relationship with AI use and how it is observed across the university and in writing practice. Following the biennial conference, presenters will have the opportunity to publish proceedings with *MENA Writing Studies Journal.*

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at AUB holds an annual international teaching conference in April. This year's 14th annual conference theme was "Teaching in Times of Crisis." For more information on the conference, you can email ctl@aub.edu.lb. To stay updated on next year's conference theme and proposal submission, visit the conference website.

If your organization or institution has events or news that you would like shared with *MENA Writing Studies Journal* readership, please email menawritingstudies@aub.edu.lb.

Organizations and Listservs

Our work in the region is not possible without the decades-long commitments from the international writing studies organizations and listserv networks below. To continue the conversation on your terms, we recommend that you engage with organizations and subscribe to the listservs below.

International Researcher's Consortium

The International Researcher's Consortium is a Standing Group at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The consortium hosts a workshop on Wednesday of the CCCC's and documents the scholarship online. The IRC also hosts workshops associated with other international conferences such as EATAW and WRAB.

MENAWCA

Middle East North Africa Writing Center Association brings together writing centers, academic support staff, and writing faculty from across the region. A biennial conference is hosted in different countries with timely themes. They also manage a google group to share correspondence regarding studies and calls for proposals. Ask to join the mailing list through this link.

Teaching Writing in Lebanon

Teaching Writing in Lebanon is a listserv dedicated to news, events, and calls for proposals relating to the teaching of writing in Lebanon. To subscribe to the listserv, sign up through this link or send an email request to teachingwritinglebanon-request@aub.edu.lb.

Transnational Composition Group

The Transnational Composition Group is a Standing Group with the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The group also has a listserv which shares information and resources regarding transnational and translingual writing practices. To subscribe to this listserv, please send an email to transnationalwriting@fiu.edu, and provide your name and email address along with a request to subscribe.

Writing Studies Listserv

The Writing Studies Listserv is a moderated list of international, but predominantly United States centered, news and postings within the composition and rhetoric community. Daily communication regarding job postings, calls for papers, and study participants are circulated. To subscribe to the listserv, follow the Writing Studies listserv link, and follow the directions.

ISBN 978-614-492-020-6