Rethinking Expertise: Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

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Second International Conference on English Across the Curriculum
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, December 5th, 2018
• How many of you are involved with a writing center?
• How many of you have a WAC program (however you define it)?
• How about an English Across the Curriculum program?
• Who has undergraduate course-embedded writing Fellows?
• Is anyone trying to start any of these programs?
WE ARE MAKING TWO ARGUMENTS:

1. Well-trained undergraduate course-embedded writing fellows are the glue that holds all of these programs together;

2. Course-embedded writing fellows working with English language learners should be non-native speakers, able to support meaning-making through translanguaging
OUTLINE

- What are course-embedded writing fellows?
- What role do they play in courses?
- Where should they be trained and located?
- What role does threshold concept knowledge play in their work?
- How should we prepare course-embedded writing fellows to work in ELL classrooms?
Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

- Undergraduate students
- Familiar with course, course materials, & expectations
- Attend all or some classes
- May facilitate writing workshops and peer-review in class
- Meet with students outside of class one-on-one or in groups

What are course-embedded college writing fellows?
• Bridge between faculty & students, model student behavior and faculty-student relationships, not another teacher.

• Assist faculty in the classroom, writing workshops, in-class support.

• Meet with faculty to discuss class & review assignments, reinforces program language & writing strategies (stealth faculty development).

• Meet with students outside of class, increase help-seeking, provide clarification of course content & assignments, facilitate meaning-making – and tutor writing.

What role do course-embedded writing fellows play in courses?
• “Basic/developmental” writing courses
• First-year writing courses
• Writing intensive courses
• Writing in the disciplines courses
Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

Where do we typically find course-embedded writing fellows in the US?

- “Basic/developmental” writing courses
- First-year writing courses
- Writing intensive courses
- Writing in the disciplines courses
- Courses for English language learners?
Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

An origin story

Trained to be embedded in first-year writing courses but mostly as tutors outside of class

The Writing Center

English Departments
Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

Trained to be embedded in first-year writing courses, but mostly as tutors outside of class (often in Centers of Academic excellence)

An evolving story; a cautionary tale
Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

The Writing Center

Trained to be embedded in first-year writing courses, but mostly as tutors outside of class (often in Centers of Academic excellence)

Writing Across the Curriculum Program

Works mostly in the classroom of writing intensive courses, familiar with disciplinary genres & course materials

English Departments

English language learning program

Subject tutoring program
**Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts**

Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

- **The Writing Center**
  - Works in first-year writing courses and mostly outside of the classroom

- **Writing Across the Curriculum Program**
  - Works mostly in the WI classroom, familiar with disciplinary genres & course materials

**English Departments**

- **English language learning program**
  - ELL tutoring program

**Subject tutoring program**

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Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

- The Writing Center
- Writing Across the Curriculum Program
- English language learning program
- ELL tutoring program
- Subject tutoring program

Co-training:

- Works in first-year writing courses and mostly outside of the classroom
- Works mostly in the WI classroom, familiar with disciplinary genres & course materials
Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

- **Horizontal first-year program**, coherency across sections; including the focus of peer response on global issues

- **Mixed ability & advanced ELL**, serve as a bridge between ELL students and monolingual or native-speaking faculty; facilitate translanguaging

- **WAC, WID, or EAC program**, discourse, genre, & threshold concept knowledge; skills transfer across courses

What role do course-embedded writing fellows play in different programs?
Concepts essential for deeper understanding of a discipline

- Transformative
- Explanatory
- Integrative
- Irreversible
- Provisional (& bounded)
- Troublesome

What role does threshold concept knowledge play in this?

Glynis Cousins “An Introduction to threshold concepts” (*Planet* No. 17 December 2006)

Meyer & Land (2003)

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Guiding students toward and through knowledge thresholds may be the single most important thing course-embedded writing fellows can do.

A writing threshold concepts is that the writing process is recursive and includes very rough first drafts that can be transformed by revision focusing on global issues not error.
Course-embedded writing fellows in ELL classrooms: who, what, and how?

Caitlin Shannon
Senior at Drew University
majoring in music and Spanish
minoring in English.

• CRLA level-three certified tutor, specialization in ELL;
• Tutored writing in both English and Spanish for 3 years;
• Course-embedded writing fellow, first-year writing & Spanish;
• Trains writing specialists & fellows working with ELL student;
• Her scholarship focuses on street art as political activism and expression of cultural identity in Barcelona, Spain & Puerto Rico.
• She has presented her work at conferences in the US and Cuba
Writing Fellows in ELL classes should be ELL students

- **Bridge between faculty & students,** the native speaking Writing Fellow is just another professor in front of whom ELL students fear making mistakes

- **Encourage translanguaging when necessary for student learning,** normalizing the flow between languages and ideas as students learn, even if the class itself is monolingual

- **Assist faculty by providing insight into where students are struggling**
What do course-embedded writing fellows bring to ELL classrooms?

• They are not additional teachers, emphasize the writing process, asking only for a very rough draft reduces the pressure to be perfect.

• Familiar with course content, genres of writing, and threshold concepts, they can explain concepts and writing rules from the perspective of someone who knows what it is like not to understand.

• Focus on revision skills as a way to grasp course material & concepts, revision should emphasize ideas and concepts, not writing skills/correctness.
Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

- Emphasize that they aren’t teachers, they don’t need to know everything
- Review course threshold concepts
  Fellows can help students most by helping them grasp disciplinary threshold concepts
- Focus on ideas, thinking, & talking
  they facilitate students working together to solve problems, review ideas, articulate questions and concepts, talk, & read aloud
- Review common grammar errors
  to increase their confidence, but remind them that they should emphasize is meaning-making not error correction!
Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

• Ongoing training and opportunity to learn as needed
  *regular staff/training meetings with the program coordinator*

• Support network of other Fellows, ideally some with more experience

• Comfortable with the professor
  *professor & fellow should feel comfortable discussing concerns and challenges*

• Professor needs to present the Fellow as credible and a valuable source of help
  *in and outside of class – this is essential*
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Thank you for coming!