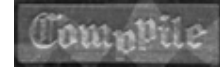




Council of
Writing
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WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies



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Directed Self-Placement & Multilingual Writers **(WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies, #26)**

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The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to provide Writing Program Administrators (WPAs) with an overview of scholarship on Directed Self-Placement (DSP) in a second-language writing context. While there are WPA-CompPile Research Bibliographies on DSP (see Directed Self-Placement: WPA-CompPile Research Bibliography, No. 16) and Second Language Writing & Writing Program Administration (see Second Language Writing and Writing Program Administration: WPA-CompPile Research Bibliography, No. 4), there is no overview of the research on DSP and multilingual writers. Given recent demographic and programmatic shifts within higher education and writing studies that have spurred an interest in DSP models inclusive of multilingual students, this annotated bibliography seeks to address this gap.

Royer and Gilles' foundational article, *Directed-Self Placement: An Attitude of Orientation*, made a simple but radical proposition: When presented with the opportunity to reflect on their own literacy experiences and academic preparation in relation to the writing course offerings at a specific institution, students can and should place themselves into the writing course that they think is best for them. However, DSP, as it has since been described in the writing assessment literature, is not simply an abandonment of mandatory placement testing, nor is it simply shifting to self-assessment instruments to place students. As Toth (2019) explains, the two pillars of DSP are guidance and choice. Students make informed choices about their course placement based upon clear guidance from the institution about course offerings and expectations. DSP procedures vary from institution to institution and range from handouts (e.g., Kenner, 2016; Ketai, 2012; Royer & Gilles, 1998), self-assessment questionnaires (e.g., Das Bender, 2011; Gere et al., 2010; Toth & Aull, 2014), self-assessment questionnaires paired with writing tasks (e.g., Gere et al., 2010; Kenner, 2016), and individual or group advising sessions (e.g., Bedore & Rosen-Knill, 2004; Chernenkoff, 2003; Gere et al., 2010).

Since its introduction, writing assessment scholars have raised ethical concerns about shifting the burden of placement onto novice writers who may be unequipped to assess their own writing abilities against a curriculum they have not yet experienced (Condon et al., 2001; Schendel & O'Neill, 1999). Schendel and O'Neill (1999) have argued that students "come to college experienced with the gaze of educational assessment" and that their perceptions of themselves may be heavily influenced by their experience with school-based assessments (p. 218). Several scholars have also pointed out that it's important to consider how race, gender, class, disability, and language background, factors that can shape students' experiences with educational assessment, might influence students' self-evaluations and perceptions of their writing abilities

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<https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/comp/pile/wpa/dsp-multilingual-writers.pdf>

(Schendel & O'Neill, 1999; Das Bender, 2011; Toth, 2019). Along these lines, Ketai (2012) has argued that DSP can implicitly privilege White mainstream English practices and values. Toth and Aull (2014) have contended that these concerns should not discourage programs from implementing DSP but rather be drawn upon to shape its design and implementation in local contexts.

Aside from ethical considerations, scholarly debates about DSP have often revolved around the concept of validity. Within the writing assessment literature, scholars have argued that evidence for validity should be grounded in how a DSP process represents the local construct of writing, as well as how its use impacts student outcomes (Toth, 2019). In other words, as Gere et al. (2010) explain, “any assessment must lead to decisions and actions that are adequate and appropriate for both the context and the persons involved” (p. 155). To this end, writing assessment scholars have urged that any DSP process must be locally validated to ensure that students are making choices that are most appropriate for them and that the process does not result in negative outcomes for certain groups. Several studies of DSP in local contexts have offered evidence that DSP may result in more equitable outcomes for structurally disadvantaged students, such as students of color and multilingual students (Decker & Taormina-Barrientos, 2024; Kenner, 2016).

Nevertheless, the question of whether multilingual students should be included in DSP has been a subject of ongoing debate. In the context of second-language writing, multilingual writers have often been excluded from DSP due to the belief that they are not equipped to make sound decisions about their language proficiency (Saengkhum, 2016). Crusan (2006, 2011), one of the earliest advocates for DSP in L2 writing, has argued that such skepticism amounts to discrimination and a form of gatekeeping. Early studies of DSP in L2 contexts have indicated that multilingual students indeed value having a voice in their placement. (Ruecker, 2011; Kenner, 2016; Saengkhum, 2016). More recent studies have demonstrated that, when given the opportunity to self-place, multilingual students can be successful in the courses that they choose. (Kenner, 2016; Ferris & Lombardi, 2020). This research has called into question the common fear among teachers of L2 writing that students will be overambitious in their course choices (Decker & Taormina-Barrientos, 2024; Ferris et al, 2017; Kim & Hammill, 2024). The Conference on College Composition and Communication’s recent *Statement on Second Language Writing & Multilingual Writers* recommends DSP as the optimal method of placement for multilingual writers, demonstrating the second-language writing field’s changing attitude toward the inclusion of multilingual learners in DSP (CCCC, 2020). Still, the use of DSP in L2 contexts is rare (Kim & Hammill, 2024).

The discussion of multilingual learners and DSP has taken on new importance in light of recent demographic changes and programmatic reforms within higher education. The multilingual student population in U.S. higher education is growing. In 2022/23, the international student population at U.S. colleges and universities grew by 12% (Institute for International Education, 2023). Resident multilingual student enrollment is also increasing, especially at public community colleges. The increasing enrollment of multilingual students in U.S. higher education has coincided with two paradigmatic shifts in the field of writing studies: The translingual turn (Horner et al., 2011) and writing placement reform (Poe & Inoue, 2016; Klausman et al., 2016). While translingualism proposes a new orientation to writing and challenges the monolingualist ideology on which many high-stakes tests are based, writing placement reform seeks to redress inequities caused by high-stakes tests, such as placement into non-credit bearing coursework, by

reimagining writing assessment as a vehicle for social justice. Together, these shifts have presented a kairotic moment for writing programs to reconsider their placement models and their impact on raciolinguistically diverse students (Toth, 2019). At the same time, they have brought increased attention to the inclusion of multilingual writers in DSP (Ferris & Lombardi, 2020). As such, many institutions have begun to consider and implement DSP as a placement tool for multilingual learners.

As institutions research and experiment with DSP models that include multilingual learners, a new body of scholarship is emerging. This literature addresses a range of questions, including but not limited to: how should “L2 Learners” or “multilingual students” be defined and identified within DSP models? How can DSP models acknowledge and account for the complex linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds of students? How much agency or freedom to select their own courses should multilingual students be given? How do multilingual students experience DSP? How do students make self-placement decisions within DSP? What are the effects of DSP on multilingual students’ course outcomes? How can writing programs understand their DSP model’s disparate impacts on different groups of students, including multilingual learners?

While the scholarship reviewed here provides no straightforward answers to these questions, it does provide useful examples of DSP models in different contexts and findings that can inform future DSP initiatives sensitive to multilingual students. My hope is that it will serve WPAs who are interested in implementing or revising DSP models to include multilingual students as well as researchers who wish to build upon this new area of scholarly inquiry.

I have divided the bibliography into three sections.

Section 1: Theoretical Arguments about Multilingual Writers and DSP

Section 2: Studies of Multilingual Writers and DSP in University Contexts

Section 3: Studies of Multilingual Writers and DSP in Community College Contexts

The works within each section have been ordered chronologically so that readers can trace the development of DSP research in L2 writing over time. The majority of articles focus on multilingual writers and DSP specifically, but articles that address writing placement and multilingual writers more generally have also been included based on relevance to DSP in L2 contexts. I have intentionally excluded foundational scholarship on DSP as it has been extensively reviewed elsewhere (see WPA-CompPile Research Bibliography, No. 16).

Section 1: Theoretical Arguments about Multilingual Writers and DSP

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

In this chapter, Crusan describes the creation and implementation of two DSP models at Wright State University and the politics of including second language writers within these DSP models. The first DSP model, which was implemented face-to-face, excluded second language writers due to resistance “from some in the second language writing community.” Crusan argues that this exclusion of second language writers is a form of discrimination and gatekeeping, but she understands her second language writing

colleagues' concerns "that [second language] students will place themselves too high or too low" and possibly set themselves up for failure (p. 212). The second DSP model, called Online Directed Self-Placement (ODSP), included second language writers. ODSP combined weighted student questionnaire data with other available data—SAT scores, TOEFL scores, high school GAP, high school rank—to generate a placement score. While ODSP is not completely self-placement, Crusan argues that it affords second language students agency in the placement process and shows promise as a reliable and viable means of placement for second language writers due to the many variables it considers.

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

In this essay, Crusan suggests that writing programs consider DSP as a placement option for L2 writers. After drawing on Roger and Gilles' (1998) foundational work to define DSP and highlighting research on students' ability to assess their own learning, she points out some of DSP's potential benefits, such as increased student autonomy and motivation to learn. She then explains that while interpretations and applications of DSP vary significantly from institution to institution, any DSP model should be grounded in the local definition of writing, the writing courses into which students will be placed, and the students' backgrounds, needs, and circumstances. Crusan ends by charging writing programs to strongly consider DSP "because of its student-centered philosophy and concern for autonomy" (p. 779).

Gallagher, C., & Noonan, M. (2017). Becoming global: Learning to "do" translingualism. In Bruce Horner & Laura Tetreault (Eds.), *Crossing divides: Exploring translingual writing pedagogies and programs* (pp. 161-177). Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

In this chapter, Gallagher and Noonan narrate the Northeastern University writing program's efforts to engage with translingualism from both a placement and pedagogical perspective. Writing from the placement perspective, Gallagher describes how the increase of multilingual students at the university, along with concerns from the university community about the language abilities of these students, set in motion curricular changes in the writing program—namely, a turn away from static ideas of academic literacy toward translingualism and openness to language difference. This turn resulted in a new placement process called guided self-placement (GSP), which the program designed as "a tool for learning about and from students how we could best teach them" (p. 166). A take on DSP, the GSP process explained course offerings, guided students through the self-placement process, and required that students write an essay to bring to their first class. Instructors would then collect and read students' essays on the first day, consult with writing program administrators about possible changes in course selection, and, if necessary, make course change recommendations to students, who could decide whether or not to accept the recommendations. While the initial implementation resulted in a "chaotic" first week, with many faculty members requesting consultations and expressing concern, Gallagher explains how, over time, the program "enacted a slow, collective shift in attitude toward language difference" (p. 168). Writing from the pedagogical perspective, Noonan recounts his journey in teaching a first-year writing

course focused on “World Englishes” and how his understanding of translingualism shifted over time.

Conference on College Composition and Communication (2020). CCCC Statement on second language writing and multilingual writers.

<https://cccc.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/secondlangwriting>

This position statement on *Second Language Writing and Multilingual Writers* from the Conference on College Composition and Communication states that placement decisions should be based on “the direct assessment of students’ writing proficiency.” The statement goes on to advocate for DSP “using a combination of direct assessment of student writing and student choice.” In other words, the statement supports a model of DSP that involves both a sample of student writing and informed student choice above alternative models of DSP that allow students to place themselves without completing a direct assessment (i.e., a written sample). As Ferris et. al (2017) note, such a model provides students with a “real-time experience with writing upon which to base their self-evaluations” (p. 3).

Guida Mesina, V. (2023). The “problem” of L2 writers in college composition placement: Identity, outcomes, and the future of directed self placement. *Studies in Applied Linguistics & TESOL*, 22(2), 23-36. <https://doi.org/10.52214/salt.v22i2.10682>

This article presents a review of the literature on the placement of L2 writers into first-year writing courses and the preliminary research on DSP in L2 contexts. The review seeks to answer two questions: (1) what are the implications of the labeling inherent in the placement of L2 writers for their motivation to learn and learning outcomes? (2) does DSP offer an alternative to traditional methods of placement for L2 writers that addresses such implications? Drawing from a wide selection of literature on the labeling of L2 learners, Mesina discusses how student perceptions of labels, course placements, and educator assumptions about L2 writers all have implications for student identity, agency, motivation, and learning. She then argues that, based upon the few studies that exist, DSP is a promising placement model for L2 writers, though more mixed methods and longitudinal research is needed to understand the efficacy of DSP in different contexts and its overall impact on student outcomes over time.

Section 2: Studies of Multilingual Writers and DSP in University Contexts

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

This descriptive study examined the results of an online directed self-placement (ODSP) tool sensitive to generation 1.5 students at Seton Hall University. DasBender explains that when this ODSP tool was first developed, it contained only one question about students’ language background and no questions about multilingual students’ literacy experiences. While the majority of international and recent immigrant students self-placed into second language writing courses, the program continued to learn of generation 1.5 students in transfer-level courses who struggled with certain literacy and language development issues. As a result, more questions were added to the ODSP tool

“that assisted...in identifying and guiding the placement” of generation 1.5 students (p. 376). After the addition of these new questions, DasBender surveyed 38 multilingual students who had graduated from American high schools about their experience with ODSP, and 24 of these students gave her permission to review their ODSP surveys. The ODSP survey results revealed that the majority of generation 1.5 students demonstrated high confidence in their language and academic literacy skills and placed themselves in mainstream writing courses. However, the follow-up survey of students’ experiences with ODSP showed that despite students’ positive beliefs about their language proficiency and preference for mainstream courses, they expressed “concern about their lack of critical, analytical skills and difficulty with structural elements of language use—specifically grammar and organization—at the end of the first semester of writing” (p. 383). Based on the survey findings, DasBender calls for more research to understand generation 1.5 students’ linguistic needs as well as tools and methods to address these needs.

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

This mixed-methods study investigated student perspectives on the effectiveness of writing course placement practices at a large, linguistically diverse university in the Southeastern U.S. that offers two First-Year Writing (FYW) tracks—English Composition & English Composition for Speakers of ESL. Ruecker surveyed approximately 400 students to understand “their attitudes regarding the way they are labeled, their feelings about placement, their conception of the difference between mainstream and ESL classes, and their ideas regarding how students should be placed” (p. 92). In addition to open-ended survey questions, Ruecker interviewed a small group of students to gather qualitative data that would add depth of understanding to student responses. The results of the study show that a significant percentage (27.1%) of students who placed into English Composition for Speakers of ESL would have preferred to be placed in English Composition. Moreover, when asked, “Would you rather be in a writing course with all nonnative speakers of English (NNESs) or in a class that includes both native and nonnative speakers of English?” 79.2% of students enrolled in English Composition for Speakers of ESL said that they would have preferred to be in a “Class that includes both native and nonnative speakers of English” (p. 102). Based on these results, Ruecker argues that WPAs should explore ways to create cross-cultural composition courses and “promote interaction between L1 and L2 learners while addressing all student needs” (p. 107). Furthermore, given the finding that students value having a say in how they are placed, he suggests that DSP may be the most effective way to place L2 writers.

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

This book is based on a qualitative, interview-based study of eleven multilingual students at Arizona State University (ASU) over the course of one academic year. The study sought to understand how multilingual students exercised agency in their placement decisions, the role of academic advisors in multilingual students’ placement decisions, and how placement policies might be developed to maximize student agency. Drawing on her theory of agency and students’ narratives, Saenkhum explains how the study

participants “*negotiate* placement, *accept* or *deny* placement, *self-assess* their proficiency as they choose a writing course, *plan for* and *question* placement [emphasis in original]” (p. 26). The major findings of the study were that most multilingual students made placement decisions based on information from their advisor, though advisors often provided incomplete or wrong information about students’ choices. Moreover, when given the opportunity to choose a course, international multilingual students preferred multilingual sections of first-year writing, whereas resident multilingual students preferred mainstream first-year writing courses. Finally, there was little communication between the writing program and writing instructors, and many writing instructors desired training in working with multilingual writers. Based on these findings, Saenkhum offers three practical recommendations for WPAs in designing placement models for multilingual writers: (1) provide as many placement options (e.g., mainstream, multilingual, cross-cultural, basic writing etc.) as possible for multilingual students, (2) clearly communicate placement information and make it accessible to students, and (3) allow multilingual students to make their own placement decisions.

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

This qualitative, interview-based study explored how six students at San Francisco State University (SFSU) felt about their ability to place themselves in first-year writing courses via DSP and how they made their placement decisions. The DSP process at SFSU enabled students to place themselves into one of three levels—a one semester first-year writing course, a two-semester first-year writing stretch course, or a development course for multilingual students (students who placed themselves in the developmental course for multilingual students were excluded from this study). Of the six study participants, three placed themselves in the one semester first-year writing course and three placed themselves in the stretch course. Three of these participants would have been placed into development courses or courses for multilingual students based on placement test cut off scores, but DSP afforded them opportunities to bypass these courses. Findings from in-depth interviews revealed both the sources of information students used to make their self-placement decisions and students’ reflections on the opportunities they felt DSP afforded them. Kenner draws on these findings to explain that the DSP process gave both monolingual and multilingual students “room to push back against oppressive aspects of the educational system—being defined by a single test score, being trapped in ESL/ELD tracks, and being forced to take expensive and time-consuming ‘remedial’ coursework—that they felt they had been victims of during their primary and secondary education” (p.283).

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

Responding to L2 writing scholars (Crusan, 2011; Ruecker, 2011) who advocate for DSP in L2 writing contexts, this study was guided by a central question: “Is there an appropriate and effective role for student voices in the placement process in this large developmental writing program for multilingual students?” (p. 2). The study sample included 1067 students who completed both a locally administered placement exam and a self-assessment survey which asked them “which level or a four-course writing program

they thought would best meet their needs” (p. 1). The researchers then statistically compared the students’ placement test results with their self-assessment survey responses. The results showed that the majority (79%) of students placed themselves within one course level of their placement test results, while 20% of students placed themselves two to three courses below or above their placement test results. While 39% of students placed themselves higher than their placement test score, which could reinforce common fears among WPAs and instructors that L2 learners will be “overambitious in their placement choices,” the researchers point out that over half (57%) of students did not place themselves at a higher level than their placement test, leading them to conclude that “program administrators and instructors should not automatically assume that L2 writers cannot be trusted to provide input about their placement outcomes” (p. 8). The data also revealed that students with lower scores on the locally administered placement test tended to place themselves in higher levels whereas students with higher scores on the placement test tended to place themselves in lower levels. Drawing on their findings, the authors explain that the study did not fully convince them to abandon their current placement model but rather to seek out possible “middle-ground solutions” that combine the use of their placement instrument with opportunities for students to have a voice in their placement (p. 9).

Ferris, D., & Lombardi, A. (2020). Collaborative placement of multilingual writers: Combining formal assessment and self-evaluation. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 13(1), 1-15.
<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7z6683m6>

This study aimed to understand the effects of a form of DSP on first-year multilingual university students’ course outcomes and attitudes after course completion. Conducted within a developmental first-year writing program for multilingual university students that included four levels, the study sample included 130 students who took a locally designed and administered placement exam and self-evaluation questionnaire. All 130 student participants received a borderline score on their placement examination; of these, 65 students indicated on the self-evaluation questionnaire that they belonged in a level higher or lower than their placement exam score, whereas the other 65 students’ self-evaluation matched their placement exam score. The former group became the pilot group, which was given an opportunity to move up or down a level, in alignment with their self-evaluation, or to remain at the level at which they tested; the latter group formed the comparison group, which was not offered the opportunity to change levels. Of the 65 students in the pilot group who were given the opportunity to move up or down, 39 students chose to move up one level, six students chose to move down one level, and 20 students decided to stay at the level at which they tested. The researchers compared the two groups across three performance measures—instructor ratings, portfolio scores, and final course grades—and surveyed the pilot group after course completion. The findings revealed that (1) students in the pilot group were indistinguishable from students in the comparison group with regard to instructor ratings, (2) course outcomes of the pilot group were not negatively affected by students’ involvement in their own placement, and (3) being offered the opportunity to have a choice in their own placement, regardless of the choice they made, contributed to the overall satisfaction of the pilot group with the placement process after their course completion.

Sinha, A. (2022). Hearing them out: Student perspectives on placement into first-year writing at a California State University via directed self-placement and early start. *The International Journal of Assessment and Evaluation* 29 (2), 31-45. <https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7920/CGP/v29i02/31-45>

This mixed methods, longitudinal study explored the use of DSP as a placement tool at a California State University (CSU) vis-à-vis an institutional remediation policy, “early start,” and its long-term effects on students’ academic outcomes throughout college. The DSP model at this CSU required students to read a passage and fill out a questionnaire. Based on questionnaire responses, students received a recommendation for a first-year writing course but were permitted to override the recommendation and self-place into one of three courses: First Year Comp, a one semester course; First Year Stretch, a two-semester course; or Multilingual Stretch, a two-semester course for multilingual learners. Sinha surveyed all students enrolled in first-year writing courses in fall 2013 to understand their “perspectives on the DSP process, early start, and their opinion, value, attitude, knowledge, and judgement around FYW” (p. 33). She then conducted interviews with six students—two in First Year Comp, two in First Year Stretch, and two in Multilingual Stretch—to better understand their experiences of DSP, their knowledge and understanding of their choices, whether they thought they made the correct choice, and how DSP and first-year writing affected their ability to write throughout college. The first round of interviews was conducted in fall 2013 and spring 2014, followed by a second round via email or phone in 2017 and 2018. The data revealed that many students chose to override their course recommendation. For example, of the 668 students who were recommended to take First Year Comp, 232 chose First Year Stretch; similarly, 244 students who were recommended to take Multilingual Stretch enrolled in First Year Stretch instead. As to the effectiveness of this CSU’s DSP model vis-à-vis the “early start” remediation policy, findings revealed a negative association between “early start” and students’ self-efficacy in self-placement: Of the 502 students who participated in “early start,” only 125 (24%) enrolled in First Year Comp, whereas 366 (60%) out of 609 students who did not participate in early start placed themselves into First Year Comp. To the question of the DSP model’s effectiveness and long-term impact, survey and interview data revealed a high level of student satisfaction with the DSP process, yet students choices were often impacted by “deficit biases perpetuated at the institutional and curriculum levels,” which followed students throughout their college experiences (p. 42). Sinha concludes that colleges and universities should consider how remediation policies and curricular and institutional pressures will impact students’ ability to exercise agency within DSP.

Horton, A. E. (2022). Two sisters and a heuristic for listening to multilingual, international students’ directed self-placement stories. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 15(1), 1 - 19. <https://doi.org/10.5070/W4JWA.222>

This study explored how two quadrilingual, bicultural, international student sisters experienced DSP at the University of Arizona. Grounded in sociocultural literacy theory, the study aimed to better understand the social, material, and theoretical consequences of DSP for both students and the program. Drawing from in-depth interviews, Horton

narrates the two sisters' placement and course experiences and how they ended up in two different courses despite their identical linguistic, cultural, and academic backgrounds. She then presents a heuristic for analyzing students' stories to consider the potential social, material, and theoretical consequences of the two sisters' experience of DSP and their course placement. Horton argues that these sisters' stories and experiences of DSP "remind us that multilingual and international student writers are complex, with unique goals for writing development, and that a one-size-fits-all approach [to placement] will not work" (p. 15). Thus, she suggests that placement should "be examined within a feedback loop" so that WPAs' expertise and students' experiences can continually be researched and iterated to curate and enhance placement and course experiences of future multilingual international students (p. 14). Horton ends by calling for more narrative, human-centered research on multilingual international students' experiences of DSP and course placement.

Johnson, K., & Vander Bie, S. (2024). Directed self placement for multilingual, multicultural international students. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1), 1 - 20.
<https://doi.org/10.5070/W4jwa.1550>

This article describes five years of institutional research on a DSP process at a small liberal arts university that serves a large body of culturally and linguistically diverse international students. Phase one of the research project began with the revision of the existing DSP process, which used the same DSP materials for all students regardless of their linguistic, cultural, or academic background. To prepare for the revision, the research team conducted extensive ethnographic interviews with international students who had recently completed the core writing requirement, and three salient concepts emerged: "literacy experience, preferred learning environment, and desire for an international classroom community" (p. 9). These three concepts were then used to shape a new DSP questionnaire that would help international students to place themselves into one of three courses: a one-semester course, a two-semester stretch course, or a two-semester stretch course specifically for international students. Survey data from three placement cycles of the new DSP process revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between how students rated themselves in relation to the three concepts and their course choice; that is, students who chose the one-semester course had higher scores in "literacy experience" and "preferred learning environment," whereas students with lower scores in these categories chose one of the two-semester stretch options. Similarly, students who selected the two-semester stretch course for international students had significantly stronger scores in "desire for an international classroom community" than their peers. The data also revealed that linguistic background was significantly associated with course choice, with more students who spoke English as their first language choosing the one-semester course and students for whom English was not a first language choosing one of the two-semester stretch options. In phase two of the research project, the researchers created an online DSP process in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and survey results from two placement cycles revealed that students with strong scores in "literacy experience" and "preferred learning environment" continued to place themselves in the one-semester course, whereas those with low scores in these areas continued to choose either of the stretch courses. In addition, students who selected the stretch course for international students had significantly higher scores in

“desire for international community.” However, in phase two, linguistic background was no longer statistically associated with course choice, which revealed that “linguistic background is only one of the reasons that students elect to take an international course” (p. 15). The researchers conclude that ethical DSP should be a recursive process that is shaped and reshaped by local context, student voices, student demographics, and student performance.

Decker, L. & Taormina-Barrientos, B. (2024). Multilingual student autonomy in directed-self-placement: Providing student choice through linguistic domains using Qualtrics scoring. *Journal of Writing Assessment*, 17(1), 1 - 20. <https://doi.org/10.5070/W4jwa.1627>

This descriptive study describes results from the creation of a new DSP process that was created in conjunction with a new corequisite composition course for Generation 1.5 students at Nevada State University. Moving away from a deficit-based approach to multilingual students, the researchers drew upon a translingual orientation to writing and an “asset-based linguistic philosophy” to create a new corequisite composition course for Generation 1.5 students (p. 8). At the same time, the researchers created a new DSP process using Qualtrics that included survey questions within three language domains: reading experiences, writing experiences, and linguistic experiences. Student responses to survey questions in each language domain resulted in three distinct placement recommendations, one for each domain, and students were “encouraged to self-select” one of three courses—a 3 credit FYW course, a 5 credit corequisite FYW course, or a 5 credit corequisite FYW course for multilingual students—“based on whether their linguistic, reading, or writing experiences matter most to them” (p. 8). In the initial rollout of the new DSP process, 316 students completed the self-placement survey. Of these, 111 students identified themselves as multilingual, and 70 of these received a recommendation to take the corequisite multilingual course. However, only 25 of these students self-selected this option. The researchers then conducted an open-ended survey to understand why students chose the corequisite course for multilingual students, or why students did not choose it even though it had been recommended to them. Four themes emerged from the survey: (1) students understood their linguistic identities and were interested in coursework that would support those identities, (2) students were drawn to the corequisite multilingual course due to a desire for a sense of community and belonging in their FYW course, (3) students saw the corequisite multilingual course as a way to advocate for themselves and their multilingual communities, and (4) students were able to exercise self-autonomy via the DSP process to resist linguistic labels and opt out of courses designed for multilingual students.

Kim, Y.J., & Hammill, M.J. (2024). Influence of prior educational contexts on directed self-placement of L2 writers. *Assessing Writing*, 61, 100870. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asw.2024.100870>

This quantitative study investigates the correlation between students’ writing placement test scores and their self-placements and between students’ educational backgrounds and their self-placements. The researchers collected data on students’ educational backgrounds, writing placement test scores, and self-placement survey results. In total, 804 students were included in the data analysis. The researchers first used frequency

analysis to compare students' placement test scores with their self-assessments. Out of 804 students, 103 (12.8%) placed themselves lower than their actual placement, 190 (23.6%) placed themselves higher than their actual placement, and 511 (63.6%) placed themselves at the same level as their actual placement. Notably, 76.4% of students did not place themselves higher than their actual placement. The researchers then used a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a relationship between students' educational backgrounds and their self-placement decisions. In sum, students who "either attended an English-medium HS for 3-4 years or attended an IEP were more likely to over-place themselves than the group of students who had neither attended an IEP nor studied in an English-medium HS for more than 2 years" (pp. 6-7). Based on these findings, the researchers argue that DSP, in combination with direct assessment of writing, allows for generally accurate placement of multilingual writers, but careful attention must be paid to students' proficiencies, identities, and educational backgrounds.

Section 3: Studies of Multilingual Writers and DSP in Community College Contexts

Toth, C. (2018). Directed self-placement at "democracy's open door": Writing placement and social justice in community colleges. In I. Asao, M. Poe, & N. Elliot (Eds.), *Writing assessment, social justice, and the advancement of opportunity* (pp. 139–172). Boulder: University Press of Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.37514/per-b.2018.0155.2.04>

In this study, Toth interviewed faculty and administrators at twelve community colleges that had piloted or implemented some form of DSP to understand their rationales for implementing DSP, the consequences of DSP on course outcomes, and the impacts of DSP on different student groups. The findings revealed many community colleges implemented DSP to address ethical and social justice concerns and that DSP had a positive effect on completion rates and, in most cases, reduced the placement of students into developmental coursework. However, no community colleges disaggregated data to understand DSP's impacts on different groups of students. While Toth notes that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that DSP can benefit students at community colleges, including multilingual students, she argues that "we need much more research into how various DSP processes serve different student groups in local community colleges, whether there is evidence of disparate impact, and what approaches to DSP might mitigate disparate impact with different local diversities" (p. 162).

Maloy, J. (2019). Binary structures in a translingual age: Investigating community college writing placement to support linguistic diversity. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 38(1), 30–55. <https://doi.org/10.37514/JBW-J.2019.38.1.03>

This article argues that writing placement procedures at community colleges should be designed in ways that acknowledge and support linguistic diversity and recommends a translingual approach to writing placement within linguistically diverse community colleges. Drawing on a study at an urban community college that compares the placement of multilingual writers into either ESL or mainstream developmental courses with survey data on their language and educational backgrounds, nationality, and cultural identifications, Maloy demonstrates how multilingual students' linguistic backgrounds "complicate" and "transcend" the static and binary categories of ESL and NES on which writing placement often relies. Maloy concludes by providing three practical

recommendations for structuring placement practices and writing programs in line with a translingual approach: (1) composition and TESOL faculty should work together to serve linguistically diverse students, (2) writing programs should create placement processes that foster and support student agency, and (3) writing programs should thoughtfully consider ways to integrate linguistically diverse students in mainstream basic writing and composition courses.

Che, C. (2023). Mind the (linguistic) gap: On “flagging” ESL students at Queensborough Community College. In J. Nastal, M. Poe, & C. Toth (Eds.), *Writing placement in two-year colleges: The pursuit of equity in postsecondary education* (pp. 191 – 222). The WAC Clearinghouse. doi: 10.37514/PRA-B.2022.1565.2.08

In this chapter, Che problematizes understandings of “ESL students” within the context of college writing placement reforms at City University of New York (CUNY). Che explains that within these reforms, implemented in the spring of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, “first-year applicants who have spent at least six months in an institution where English is not the primary language would be ‘flagged’ and receive an ‘ESL indicator,’” leading to a significantly different trajectory in course placement (p. 192). Drawing on student outcomes data before and after the implementation of reforms and perspectives from CUNY administrators and English faculty, Che argues that we need to “identify more flexible ESL ‘identifiers’” that are not bound by country of birth, multilingualism, speaking English as a second language, or exit exam scores, as the use of such identifiers may unnecessarily place first-year-writing ready students into developmental coursework or overlook students who have been educated domestically but would benefit from supplemental English instruction (p. 203). Overall, Che urges writing programs to challenge monolithic assumptions about what constitutes an “ESL student” and to develop more “agentive, personal, equitable and accurate placement protocols for our diverse community college students” (p. 209).

Snyder, S.E., Amani, S., & Kato, K. (2023). Community college online Directed Self-Placement during the COVID-19 pandemic. In J. Nastal, M. Poe, & C. Toth (Eds.), *Writing placement in two-year colleges: The pursuit of equity in postsecondary education* (pp. 263 – 278). The WAC Clearinghouse. doi: 10.37514/PRA-B.2022.1565.2.11

This quantitative study sought to determine whether any difference exists between placement tool and placement level, placement tool and enrollment level, and placement tool and course success outcomes. In the spring of 2020, the researchers proposed a multilingually sensitive online directed self-placement (ODSP) tool to help multilingual students determine their placement into mainstream or multilingual first-year writing courses, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which rendered the current ACCUPLACER placement tool unusable, the researchers revised the ODSP placement tool so that it could be used for all incoming students. After initial implementation of ODSP, the researchers analyzed four semesters (spring 2019 – fall 2020) of English placement, enrollment, and course outcomes data, which they broke up into two groups by placement tool: ACCUPLACER (2,240 student records) and ODSP (203 student records). The findings suggested there was a statistically significant difference between placement tool and placement level and placement tool and enrollment level. Of the 2,240 students who took the ACCUPLACER, 344 (15.36%) placed into transfer-level courses, whereas ODSP

placed 107 (52.71%) of 203 students into transfer-level courses. The data also revealed a misalignment between placement and enrollment data. For example, even though ACCUPLACER placed only 344 students into transfer-level courses, 1390 ACCUPLACER students enrolled in transfer-level courses. While the researchers note that they cannot speculate regarding *how* these students enrolled, they explain that one possible explanation may be “the lifting of placement algorithms within the student enrollment software” during the pandemic (p. 273). The course outcomes data revealed that none (0.00%) of the 344 students placed by ACCUPLACER into transfer-level courses were successful, whereas 65 (57.52%) students placed into transfer-level courses by ODSP were successful. Moreover, of the 1390 students who enrolled in transfer-level courses, regardless of their initial ACCUPLACER placement, 1000 were successful, around 70 percent. The researchers conclude that ACCUPLACER “consistently underestimates students for placement” and that students, when given guidance and agency through DSP to select the class that is best for them, can be successful in the class that they choose (p. 274).