Articles

Meaningful Writing Projects Among Multilingual Undergraduate Writers: Personal, Practical and Developmental

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Our research explores the meaningful writing experiences of 325 undergraduate students who self-identify as multilingual. Through qualitative coding of open-ended survey data, we found that respondents considered their writing meaningful when it allowed them to make personal and relevant connections and learn new skills and strategies. Our findings are aligned with the results of *The Meaningful Writing Project*, suggesting that the ways all students find their writing meaningful are interwoven with their identities, histories, and aspirations. After presenting our analysis of multilingual students' responses, we posit several conditions for teaching writing across the curriculum that allow complex, mobile language users to exercise their personal, social, and linguistic resources and have the opportunities for meaningful writing experiences.

Recent statements from professional organizations describing student outcomes of college-level writing classes, including classes for multilingual students, largely offer teacher-driven criteria of what "success" might look like. For instance, in "The Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing" (Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English) and the "WPA Outcomes Statement for First Year Composition" (Council of Writing Program Administrators), we are told students should develop "habits of mind," "knowledge of conventions," and "integrate their own ideas with ideas of others," among other outcomes. These teacher-driven constructs are seemingly generic, assumed to be applicable to all students, no matter the language and personal assets that students bring to our classrooms, labs, writing centers, and other learning spaces. A notable absence is the idea that students should find their writing to be meaningful.

In contrast and in response to these initiatives, Michele Eodice, Anne Ellen Geller and Neal Lerner (*The Meaningful Writing Project*) introduced the student-driven construct of meaningful writing. To challenge the traditional top-down ways of writing assignment design and instruction, Eodice et al. (*The Meaningful Writing Project*) centered students' perspectives to understand

their needs as developing writers. Based on surveys and interviews with over 700 seniors across three institutions, they conclude that undergraduates find writing meaningful when they have opportunities "to tap into the power of personal connection; immerse themselves in what they are thinking, writing, and researching; experience what they are writing as applicable and relevant to the real world; imagine their future selves" (Eodice et al. "What Meaningful Writing Means").

While the pedagogical and research importance of the Meaningful Writing Project (MWP) has resonated for many readers, Eodice et al.'s study (*The Meaningful Writing Project*) focuses on all students' without paying specific attention to multilingual writers. Yet, with the increasing internationalization of higher education and a more diversified domestic student body, American college campuses have evolved into "fundamentally multilingual spaces" (Conference on College Composition and Communication). As a result, centering linguistic diversity and multilingualism is essential to understanding students' writing experiences (Donahue; Halasek, Clinnin, and Selfe; McCorkle).

In the research we report on here, we follow Mary Hedengren's urging in her review that "more research in writing studies should follow the example of *The Meaningful Writing Project*, laying aside our teacher-based assumptions and instead reaching out to a wide variety of students to discover insights into their college experience" (256; see also Baker and Wright; Canagarajah). Our research seeks to uncover the perception of meaningful writing experiences of students who identify as multilingual at a private R1 university in the northeast United States.

Our study hinges on the intersection of two terms: multilingualism and meaningful writing. Contrary to common administrative practices that conflate the terms multilingual student with international student or second-language learner, we take multilingualism as a self-reported construct (see the Methods section for more on how students reported language identity). Following Yuko Butler's definition of multilingual writers as "individuals or groups of people who obtain communicative competence in more than one language, with various degrees of proficiencies, in oral and/or written forms, in order to interact with speakers of one or more languages in a given society," multilingual in our research is not a concept determined by students' levels of proficiency in various languages (112). Instead, we consider multilingual a self-reported construct, reflecting the fluidity and complexity of students' languaging practices and linguistic identities. As for the term *meaningful*, our intent is to be faithful to the impetus for the MWP: Rather than pre-define *meaningful* for students taking our survey, we aimed to highlight students' agency and voices (Horner and Tetreault; Kiernan, Meier, and Wang) to create a student-driven construct of the word.

As such, we started with a descriptive question: What do multilingual students describe as meaningful writing projects? We found that perceptions of meaningful writing across our study participants were largely consistent with college seniors in the original MWP (Eodice et al. *The Meaningful Writing Project*). Moreover, since our respondents reported meaningful writing experiences from across the curriculum, our findings are not only relevant for composition specialists (who might already recognize diverse students' linguistic assets) but also for faculty who teach writing in the disciplines, where deficit views of multilingualism may persist. Based on the responses from linguistically diverse students that we analyze in this article, we posit several teaching and learning premises for meaningful writing in an increasingly fluid higher education context.

The Meaningful Writing Project

Because our study is based, in part, on *The Meaningful Writing Project* (Eodice et al.), we offer a brief overview of the MWP's methods of data collection and analysis. One component of the MWP was a survey distributed in spring 2012 to seniors at three U.S. research institutions. The survey asked students the following open-ended question:

> Think of a writing project from your undergraduate career up to this point that was meaningful for you and answer the following questions: What was the writing project you found meaningful? (Please describe it.) What made that project meaningful for you? (Eodice et al. *The Meaningful Writing Project* 9)

Based on 707 survey responses, Eodice et al. developed 22 codes to describe the data, four of which occurred most frequently–when students:

1. described a "personal connection" to the topic they were writing about or to their identities as writers and students,
2. saw their meaningful writing as applicable or relevant to their presents and/or futures,
3. described the content they were learning itself as a meaningful experience,
4. found the process of research and writing a primary contributing factor to a project's meaningfulness (*The Meaningful Writing Project* 4).

Based on these findings, Eodice et al. conclude that for faculty "to make writing agentive, relevant, and consequential, projects can be designed to cultivate personal connections, relations to future selves, and the disposition for lifelong learning" (*The Meaningful Writing Project* 130).

The MWP offered an emic understanding of how students engage with their writing in meaningful ways, representing a shift in viewing student writing via "outcomes" research (e.g., solely looking at students' written products) to viewing student writing in terms of the "incomes" (Guerra) they bring to their learning and how opportunities for agency and engagement might be cultivated through meaningful writing. While MWP's findings were limited to a relatively small sample size within three particular institutions, its conclusions have resonated with readers interested in shaping writing instruction to make students' experience of learning more meaningful. As Jeanine Williams notes in her review of the book, MWP is "a useful work for anyone who wishes to connect an assignment to the greater scope of their students' lives and provide a college experience that resonates beyond the classroom" (63). Yet, despite its importance as an insightful framework to understand writing pedagogy from learners' perspectives, the MWP focused on college seniors in general. It remains unclear whether those findings hold true for multilingual writers. In this study, we focused the MWP lens on self-identified multilingual students at our university.

Methods

Research Context

This study occurred at Northeastern University (NU), a private research-intensive university in the northeastern United States that saw the percentage of international undergraduate student enrollment increase from 9.7% to 16.8% from 2009 and 2019, making NU one of the top international-student host institutions in the US. (Pseudonyms are assigned throughout to protect privacy.) In our institutional context where student mobility and multilingualism is the norm, the idea of "superdiversity" (Vertovec) is particularly applicable. The prefix super- was added to highlight "the sense of superseding" and to depict "what is 'above and beyond' what was previously there" (Meissner and Vertovec 545). Superdiversity transcends the simple concept of viewing diversity in its plural form, but instead emphasizes the intersectionality and complexity of the interactions of all factors related to mobility (Blommaert; Horner et al.). Mya Poe and Qianqian Zhang-Wu point out that thanks to global mobility, most college students either come from multilingual households or grow up exposed to rich linguistic diversity. These students' linguistic capabilities are often messily aligned with their nationalities and ethnicities ("Confronting Superdiversity"; Zhang-Wu). In short, traditional terms like *ELL* and *international* to describe multilingual students are not adequate to capture the complex language identities of our students.

Consider, for example, Anjali who is an accounting major originally from India who grew up in Israel and New York. Anjali speaks Hindi, Hebrew, Spanish, and English. Or Xue, a computer science major who was born in Shenzhen, China. After moving between Hong Kong and Bejiing as a child, he continued primary school in Athens and Paris and later completed secondary school in Japan, Shenzhen, and the United States. Xue speaks Mandarin, Cantonese, English, Greek, Japanese, and some French. The lives of these students, among many more, typified our need for more nuanced approaches to acknowledge multilingualism in our institutional context and look beyond rigid terms such as *second-language learners*.

Our university, however, did not always meet this changing demographic with an asset-oriented mindset. During a period of large increases in international student enrollment, a 2012 Faculty Senate report stated that "faculty and advisors have noted an increasing number of cases where individual student success is limited by English language understanding/ability" and called for "a diagnostic screening for entering students for whom English is not a native language." We need to note that the authors of this report did not consult with Writing Program faculty with expertise in multilingual writing (nor, as far as we know, was diagnostic screening ever implemented). Nevertheless, several Writing Program faculty recognized the need to better understand the changing demographic of our students and to respond to this deficit-oriented institutional mindset.

As a result, we engaged in several years of IRB-approved data collection via undergraduate surveys beginning in 2013 to understand multilingual students' writing experiences in our super diverse context (for findings of our program-based multilingual surveys over the past decade, see "Confronting Superdiversity" and "Confronting... Again"; Gallagher and Noonan; Poe and Zhang-Wu).

Our Survey

In our 2018 iteration of the survey, recognizing the importance of a student-centered approach to inform writing pedagogy, we added a question to investigate the construct of meaningful writing that has become the basis of the present study. Specifically, in addition to 34 questions tapping into students' linguistic identities (e.g., languages spoken in the home), histories (e.g., languages spoken in school) and practices (e.g., preferred language after graduation), we added an open-ended question identical to the central question in Eodice et al. (*The Meaningful Writing Project*): "Think of a writing project [. . .] that was meaningful [. . .] What made that project meaningful for you?"

We distributed our survey to 5,382 NU undergraduates who had completed the second course in our required writing sequence, Advanced Writing

in the Disciplines (AWD). For context, NU requires that students take at least four designated "writing-intensive courses," (first year writing, advanced writing, and two courses in their majors); most students will take AWD in junior or senior year, and thus have likely engaged nearly all of the required writing coursework. We received 1,153 survey responses, a response rate of 21%. We posed two questions to find a population of multilingual students for the purposes of our study: Are languages other than English spoken in your family home? Even if languages other than English are not often spoken in your family home, do you consider another language to be important to your ethnic and/or cultural identity?

A total of 488 respondents answered "yes" to one of these questions; together, they named 84 different languages that were spoken in the home or important to their ethnic/cultural identity (see Appendix). Of these, 325 students offered responses to our meaningful writing question, and these data constitute the corpus for the analysis that follows.

Analysis

To analyze students' description of their meaningful writing experiences, we followed the tradition of qualitative coding, ensuring reliability and validity through a recursive process of description, negotiation, and confirmation (Saldaña). It's important to note that we did not simply apply the codes developed in the original MWP research (Eodice et al. *The Meaningful Writing Project* 157); instead, we decided to approach coding through an emic perspective, based on what we saw in each response, and thus our goal was to develop a code book specific to our data.

Following Cheryl Geisler's recommendation, we applied a single code to each response, determining in each case which code or reason the student offered for why the project was meaningful seemed most emphasized. To establish our codes, we first separately and then collectively developed codes that offered preliminary descriptions of the data, and then went through several rounds of applying those codes to a randomly selected number of responses. Once our level of agreement was acceptable, we determined a final code book (see Table 1). We then assigned each student's response to two of our research team members to code independently. Next, we compared coding results. In cases of discrepancies, we negotiated an agreed-upon code or we used a third reader to determine the final code.

Table 1. Codebook with Results

Code	Description	Example	Count	% of Total
PERS	Writing to share personal experience, note personal growth, or express connection to the subject	"Doing a research paper on educational systems... was a very personally interesting topic for me. It focused on an issue which directly concerns my dad's home country."	113	34.8%
PRAC	Writing for practical reasons—for major or work	"In my advanced writing class creating a flyer ... was meaningful because that is something that I could be doing in the real world."	70	21.5%
IMPRO	Writing to improve—challenging yet helpful	"I found it meaningful because of the amount of work involved in preparing the project and for the quality of work I feel I produced. Combining hard work with good work leads to meaningful work."	51	15.7%
NEW	Writing as a novel experience (possibly creative/fun projects)	"One project that stood out to me was writing a buzzfeed article. I thought that was completely different than the other projects I've done."	28	8.6%
REQ	Writing to meet a requirement (not enjoyable or meaningful)	"I write only to satisfy requirements. I don't find it particularly enjoyable."	16	4.9%
CHANGE	Writing to change someone's mind	"In a class I'm currently taking, an assignment included writing a letter to an individual to hopefully affect some kind of change and be a disabilities advocate. . . . Working on your writing skills does not only mean improving your ability to write an essay, but also... encourage[s] meaningful conversation."	10	3.1%

Code	Description	Example	Count	% of Total
TEACH	Teacher-student relationship noted	"In my first year writing class I wrote an oped piece. . . . I found the project meaningful because my professor gave me thoughtful feedback on writing that I had put effort into."	9	2.8%
INSUFFICIENT INFO	Not enough information provided	"Zika virus project."	28	8.6%
TOTAL			325	100%

Findings

Multilingual students in our study find writing meaningful when offered opportunities to fulfill personal, practical, and developmental goals. Such perceptions are consistent with the cross-institutional undergraduate population analyzed by Eodice et al. (*The Meaningful Writing Project*), lending evidence that meaningful writing is a robust construct, one that intersects multiple identities and centers all students' desires for agency and consequential learning.

Meaningful Writing for Multilingual Students: Personal, Relevant, Developmental

As shown in Table 1, we found that nearly three quarters of the self-identified multilingual students in our study found their writing meaningful when it offered a way to:

1. share personal experience or experience growth or express a personal connection to the topic;
2. see their writing as practical or relevant or connected to their majors or their future professional identities; and
3. offer a means to improve a skill or strategy or learn a new way of writing.

These three codes connect strongly to the "personal connection," "applicability/relevance," and "content learning" codes that were most frequent in the Eodice et al.'s MWP study (*The Meaningful Writing Project*). We next offer examples of each of these frequently occurring codes. To note, we have omitted linguistic identifiers when providing excerpts to avoid reductively correlating

findings with particular language backgrounds. We direct our readers instead to the multilingual context of our respondents (see Appendix).

Code "PERS"

The largest set of student responses (34.8%) fell under PERS (personal). This echoes findings from previous research, indicating the importance of writing in facilitating personal reflection (e.g., Leonard; Vieira) and identity expression (e.g., Canagarajah; Cox) among multilingual writers. Students' responses highlighted writing projects where they had choice and were "able to relate" or establish "a real connection" between their meaningful writing projects and their identities. Occasionally, these responses talked about popular culture–such as writing about *Lord of the Rings*—but more prevalent themes included times when students found projects meaningful when their identities were closely tied to that writing, such as when they wrote of familial history, when they were able to investigate subject matter tightly linked to their own identity, or when they were able to construct a version of themselves in their writing. As one student wrote, "I [. . .] ended up with an extremely personal piece about my grandparents, who are Cuban refugees and struggled to learn, read, and write English here." Similarly, another student wrote about a historical project that was meaningful "because it connected to my family's own history of being Jewish Americans living in Georgia at the same time the case took place." In these cases, writing became meaningful when thus far invisible threads of their linguistic and cultural identity were pulled to the surface through the writing project.

Heritage was not the only identity connector, however. For instance, an engineering student found writing meaningful when it allowed her to connect her professional identity as an engineer and personal identity as a Black woman:

> The writing project that was the most meaningful… is a compiled project over the system about Black Women in STEM. [. . .] I am a Black woman, I'm from Ethiopia, so the significance of this project is very personal to me.

This type of meaningful writing relates to another theme in the PERS code, where multilingual writers valued the opportunity to showcase themselves. For example, a student found filling out a pre-med application packet particularly meaningful because:

> The process allowed me to evaluate my life and academic experiences and paint them in a manner that would convince the committee [. . .]. It was incredibly meaningful because it introduced me to the

style of really writing in a way that would showcase my personality, experiences, and determination.

While researchers have investigated the construction of the self in multilingual writers' autobiographical and creative writing (e.g., Yang; Hanauer), we extend this work by showing a correlation between personal writing experiences and the learners' sense of value. Our results echo Eodice, Geller, and Lerner's findings in "The Power of Personal Connection," where students draw on internal (e.g., writerly identity and development) and external (e.g., family, community, peers) factors to make writing meaningful.

Code "PRAC"

PRAC (practical and relevant) was our second most frequently occurring code, capturing 22% of the total responses. PRAC was assigned when students described writing with a real-world impact—writing that transcends the classroom and connects to broader social and professional interests. This code is similar to Eodice et al.'s "APP+" code, one that accounts for students finding writing projects meaningful when they were applicable, relevant, authentic, or real world (*The Meaningful Writing Project*).

One student wrote about "creating a flyer that targeted a specific audience. It was meaningful because that is something that I could be doing in the real world." In some responses, students found meaning in the opportunities connected with their intended careers post-graduation. One student wrote, "I have prepared a poster, abstract, and scripts for the American Chemical Society meeting in Boston. It is meaningful because it is important to my career as a scientist." We note that these writing projects cut across multiple genres and multiple fields, reflective of the complexity of writing in the "real world" (Brandt). But in each case, students expressed a clear connection between what they chose as meaningful and what they expected to be doing as professionals.

Students also considered writing projects meaningful when they were applicable to their coursework or majors. We distinguish codes PRAC from PERS by observing that students in this category saw the practicality of their meaningful writing projects in a shorter time frame; these projects had connections to other courses they might be taking or to their studies as a whole, as in the following response: "Lab reports in engineering classes helped me practice communicating technical data and conclusions/actions based on that data."

Finally, students found writing projects meaningful when they were relevant to issues with which they were deeply involved. While not occurring as frequently as other responses within this category, several students noted the "practicality" of their projects as related to concerns they had for justice or equity or topics for which they expressed passion. One student told us

that they "designed a mock 'app' with a group about personalized medicine," which they found meaningful because it was "definitely a cool and meaningful experience to see how the class material I was learning could be meaningfully applied, even in a mock setting!"

Overall, responses coded as PRAC described writing projects that were: (1) applicable to their future careers/future identities or disciplinary fields, (2) applicable to their coursework or majors; (3) relevant to their current concerns or issues with which they were deeply involved.

Code IMPRO

We coded 51 responses (15.7%) IMPRO (improvement), where students felt that some aspect of their knowledge and/or skills improved. Some responses were marked by the intensity of the work ("it was the most amount of writing and research I have ever done"). Other responses were characterized by gratitude: "I have worked a lot with scientific research writing in my present co-op and am very grateful for the opportunities to expand my knowledge and skills in that field." Many in this coding category saw what they were learning as not merely for practical gain or applicability, but for satisfaction from a learning opportunity. As one student described, "I felt extremely accomplished after I was finished with it."

The Absence of Meaningful Writing

Not every student who filled out our survey and the MWP question reported having had a meaningful writing experience. In these responses, which we coded REQ (required), 16 out of 325 respondents (4.9%) mentioned that they did not find any writing meaningful, as in this response: "There wasn't anything that was meaningful, all the assignments were just required." This finding was consistent with Eodice et al.'s MWP as a whole, in which 4% of students filling out the survey reported no meaningful writing experiences as undergraduates (*The Meaningful Writing Project*).

Two students specified particular definitions of meaningful: "None of my writing assignments have been particularly meaningful. Some of them have been interesting to research or had interesting topics, but I wouldn't call any of them meaningful." In this case, the participant distinguished between the concepts of interesting and meaningful, associating meaningful writing with important events and ideologies in life. This illustrates the dynamics of meaningful writing: An assignment from a particular class might lead to a meaningful writing experience for one student in that class, but not for all. What seems essential are the ways an assignment might offer "expansive framing" (Engle et al.) or the opportunities for students to make personal or practical connections or explore the possibilities for improvement or knowledge making.

Discussion

As we consider the pedagogical implications of our study, we must note the sheer variety of locations and instances of meaningful writing—derived, perhaps, from the superdiversity of our multilingual population and the "dynamic, embodied, and deeply distributed" (Fraiberg 168) contexts in which they write. While we cannot dictate when and where meaningful writing happens, we can describe several premises about meaningful writing and dispositions towards students that can create opportunities for students to see value in their writing processes or products.

1. Meaningful writing is likely to happen when students are invited to connect their experiences and aspirations to course content.

Our study, particularly our findings for responses we coded PERS, points to the importance of moving away from deficit thinking, i.e., "students cannot," "students are unprepared," "languages other than English get in the way of learning to write." As other scholars have pointed out, embracing an asset orientation to multilingual students is essential for recognizing students' agency and ongoing re-creations of their identities in writing (e.g., Guerra; Mori; Scotland; Shapiro and MacDonald; Yang). We saw repeatedly in our survey students describing writing projects that offered pathways to connect their interests and histories with course content, such as the following:

> A writing project I found meaningful was the academic autobiography I completed in Advanced Writing. This project really helped me examine why I chose my major and what drives me in motivating me. I also ended up doing a lot of interesting research on theorists in my field that I previously knew next to nothing about. (PRAC)

Some assignments are more suitable for these kinds of opportunities than others; however, even in relatively rigid and prescribed genres, incorporating informal writing alongside more formal tasks can invoke students' connective thinking and motivation that are essential to meaningful writing (Hill and Shooshanian).

2. Meaningful writing is likely to happen when students are entrusted with choice.

Students regularly emphasized some version of the following: "I had a lot of freedom to choose the topic" (PERS). This echoes the work of other multilingual writing scholars who have for some time observed the generative effects of personal and identity-based writing projects that help multilingual students recognize their linguistic assets and develop their agency as writers (e.g.,

Bizzaro and Baker; Hanauer; Shapiro et al.). It is also consistent with Eodice et al.'s MWP finding that the possibility of "choice" occurred in nearly one third of all responses (*The Meaningful Writing Project* 36). We echo existing calls for agency and choice in topic, but we also caution against a reductive assumption that personal writing is always meaningful. While many students in our survey appreciated opportunities to explore their cultural/linguistic histories and to experiment with novel forms, some respondents explicitly stated that "creative/personal" writing or even "interesting" topics were not necessarily meaningful.

We observe instead that students who feel committed to a topic and its outcomes are by extension more likely to be committed to their readers. One student mentioned, "I was very …*committed* to writing exactly how I felt about the topic. I wanted other people reading my paper to be able to understand my thoughts and ideas" (PERS). The student highlighted "commitment" and used it to trace a compelling relationship to their audience. Topic choice, then, may create opportunities for meaning when students can imagine themselves within a community of readers and writers who share a common goal (Scotland).

3. Meaningful writing often occurs when students can imagine connections between their past and future selves.

In some cases, this outcome occurs when students can conceptualize a sequence in their skills. Sometimes, students described the process as an apotheosis, as one Economics major did when describing a paper as a culmination of learning: "I finally put my education to work by writing a paper based on data and statistics" (PRAC). Other students connected past and future selves while writing from a threshold (e.g., applying to graduate school or returning from internship). One student described an application for a prestigious scholarship, emphasizing the challenge of writing about "everything I had ever accomplished in my life" (PERS). This student emphasized the arduousness of the writing process, a theme that we elaborate on in the following observation.

4. Meaningful writing can happen when students are faced with a challenge and able to construct a resolution.

Here, we separate the concept of writing being enjoyable from it being meaningful, with each essentially functioning as a subset of the IMPRO code we described above. For example, one student contends, "The lit review … was probably most meaningful. While I didn't like it, I feel that it helped me better understand how to conduct research and apply it to my writing." Students regularly discussed the importance of intellectual rigor in their meaningful assignments, such as when a health sciences major talked about a paper on

drug prices that was "the most applicable" paper of her undergraduate career yet "the hardest to write." Challenges happened in students' disciplines and also in required writing courses. As one student put it, "The project was difficult and took a long time to complete, but I value it because of the depth of the paper and the lessons I learned along the way." In other words, students may struggle with writing, but they found meaning in the trajectory of improvement. As a result, one application for faculty who work with multilingual writers may be to avoid watering down writing-intensive assignments. Easier projects do not make an assignment more memorable or meaningful. Moreover, 2.8% (9 out of 325) of our respondents specifically mentioned instructor guidance: "I got feedback from my professor on a higher level" or "My professor was also extremely helpful . . . and I felt I got better as a writer" (see "TEACH" code in Table 1). For these students, the relational aspect of going through a difficult writing task perhaps helped make the experience meaningful.

5. Meaningful writing did not happen in a specific location.

We were pleased to find that 43% (141 out of 325) of our population mentioned our required Writing Program courses as the sites of their meaningful writing. While that finding might speak to the paucity of writing opportunities in their other classes, we are reminded of the potential impact of required writing. Rather than a mere hurdle to overcome, required writing courses might represent opportunities to put into place the elements for meaningful writing to occur.

However, we also saw many occasions outside of writing courses where students found meaning. Meaningful writing happened in internships, capstone projects, and courses in fields as varied as biology, management, and civil engineering—and, of course, meaningful writing happened nowhere for students who didn't find any writing meaningful. As a result, one premise that we hold as writing faculty is that meaningful writing happens in unpredictable sites across the curriculum and in the workplace. This conclusion reinforces the centrality of writing in subject courses and professional settings, even if it appears as a hidden curriculum (Gere). Consequently, faculty who are not writing specialists are also responsible for preparing multilingual students as writers in the disciplines (e.g., Zhang-Wu). The pedagogical implications of meaningful writing, then, apply not just to faculty who already identify as writing teachers but to faculty in the disciplines and advisors, mentors, and coaches who support students in their professional goals (Cox; Gere et al.; Zawacki and Cox).

Conclusion

In this article, we have established connections between multilingual writers and meaningful writing to highlight the role of students' autonomy and self-definition in writing contexts. We have also shown that multilingual students at our institution found writing meaningful in ways consistent with Eodice et al.'s *Meaningful Writing Project* findings for a more general student population, indicating that the original construct of MWP continues to hold true for students from culturally, racially and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In essence, the "power of personal connection," a key concept of the MWP, is driven by students' desires to learn, and those desires span language categories and institutions. What is most important, in our view, is that writing researchers and teachers adopt a view of student learning based on students' incomes (Guerra), assets (Shapiro and MacDonald), capital (Mori) or the experiences, desires, and goals students bring to any learning situation, but particularly to those in which writing is central.

That is not to say that students' linguistic identities are not important on the surface. While we found few salient differences in how these different populations perceived meaningfulness compared to the more general population in Eodice et al. 's MWP (*The Meaningful Writing Project*), we believe that is a consequence of the student-driven construct of meaningful writing. This asset-based approach invites students to make personal connections and apply practical goals to their writing tasks, an approach that is similarly generative for linguistically diverse groups of learners. This conclusion is significant for any faculty who support writing in the disciplines and must advocate for diverse students' linguistic assets with faculty and counter prevalent deficit mindsets when it comes to multilingual writers.

Focusing on self-identified multilingual students' perceptions of their meaningful writing experiences both within and beyond college composition classrooms (i.e., during content-area learning such as lab reports and social interactions such as internship), our study sheds important light on writing pedagogy across the curriculum. Because no content-area knowledge can be expressed without language, all disciplinary faculty members are in essence also writing teachers (Zhang-Wu; Zhang-Wu and Brisk). Echoing the student-centeredness of the MWP and the approach of many multilingual-student specialists (e.g., Donahue; Shapiro et al.), we call for higher education teachers both within and beyond the writing program to pay attention to multilingual students' own articulation of their identities and meaning-making at various points of their careers, and how they describe their strategic use of multiple languages in their personal, academic, and professional lives.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our exploratory study is limited due to its highly contextualized nature and site-specific findings. We have tried to mitigate this limitation by comparing our results to the wider Meaningful Writing Project and have found that students who self-identify as multilingual define meaningful writing in ways similar to the respondents in the broader MWP. Nevertheless, our intention is not to offer a prescription for designing meaningful writing assignments at the college level, but to foreground the needs of multilingual writers through a student-centered approach and examine the intersection of meaningful writing and multilingualism.

Our study has raised many questions that need to be explored by future research: Do multilingual college students' conceptions of meaningful writing change over the course of their undergraduate and graduate careers? Are multilingual students' perceptions of meaningful writing at odds with writing faculty constructions of meaningful writing? What methodological approaches will help researchers trace the emergence of meaningful writing with multilingual students in diverse contexts? Finally, while our study focuses on multilingual students' perceptions of meaningful writing, what exactly do meaningful-writing informed curricula look like in college composition classrooms as well as content-area instructions across the disciplines?

Offering all students opportunities to have meaningful writing experiences should be the goal of any class in which writing plays a role (as well as non-classroom contexts such as professional internships, laboratories, and community settings). More broadly, offering students opportunities for meaningful learning is at the heart of our educational enterprise, and multilingual students bring considerable assets to their writing—their languaging practices are often fluidly deployed as assets and blended between multiple systems (e.g., Canagarajah; García; Horner et al; Jørgensen.). Canagarajah has reminded us that when teaching multilingual writers, rather than "impos[ing] a one-size-fits-all pedagogy," teachers need to constantly learn from students and "develop teaching practices from the strategies learners themselves use" (415).

In sum, our study contributes to The Meaningful Writing Project framework by drawing attention to the importance of personal, practical and aspirational aspects in meaning-making among learners from culturally, racially and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Following a long tradition of student-centered learning, we see students—their histories, linguistic resources, hopes, and aspirations—as central to our work, and as a starting point for constructing learning contexts that are truly meaningful.

Appendix: Languages/Dialects Cited by Multilingual Students at NU (2018)

Language	Total Frequency	Language spoken in family home	Language not spoken in the home but important to ethnic/ cultural identity
Chinese *Mandarin* *Other dialects (Cantonese, Taiwanese, Fuzhounese, Shanghainese, Teochew, Hok-kien)*	**123** *79* *44*	102 *68* *34*	20 *11* *10*
Spanish	**86**	60	26
Italian	**33**	13	20
Korean	**30**	28	2
French	**29**	16	13
German	**29**	19	10
Hebrew	**26**	4	22
Russian	**23**	23	0
Hindi	**17**	13	4
Arabic	**14**	13	1
Japanese	**12**	6	6
Vietnamese	**11**	11	0
Gujarati	**9**	9	0
Haitian Creole	**7**	6	1
Greek	**7**	6	1
Portuguese	**8**	8	0
Yiddish	**7**	0	7
Gaelic	**6**	0	6
Marathi	**6**	6	0
Punjabi	**6**	6	0
Polish	**5**	4	1

Language	Total Frequency	Language spoken in family home	Language not spoken in the home but important to ethnic/ cultural identity
Tamil	**5**	4	1
Albanian	**4**	3	1
Bengali	**4**	4	0
Hungarian	**4**	3	1
Tagalog	**4**	2	2
Telugu	**4**	3	1
Twi	**4**	3	1
Urdu	**4**	4	0
Armenian	**3**	3	0
Finnish	**3**	1	2
Igbo	**3**	2	1
Khmer	**3**	3	0
Thai	**3**	2	1
Turkish	**3**	3	0
Other languages cited (≤ 2 occurrences) Afrikaans, Akan, Amharic, American Sign Language, Assamese, Bafang, Bahasa Indonesia, Bisaya, Braille, Cape Verdean Creole, Creole, Croatian, Ewe, Fante, Farsi, Flemish, Ga, Hausa, Hawaiian, Ilocano, Kannada, Kazakh, Kichwa, Lithuanian, Malayalam, Norwegian, Patois, Persian, Pidgin English, Romanian, Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, Sindhi, Sinhalese, Swahili, Swedish, Tirolerisch, Tongan, Ukrainian, Welsh, Zulu			

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