**GLCA: Teaching Writing to Multilingual Writers,** *College of Wooster, November 1-3, 2019*

**Module Context: Assignment Design and Scaffolding**

Research into assignment design and scaffolding the production of written texts for multilingual writers provides the following key theoretical considerations for faculty and their classrooms.

First, the language of a writing assignment is understood to have different meanings dependent on one’s previous experiences, including novice/expert status, taken-for-granted cultural norms, previous writing assignments, disciplinary community, genre, and so on. There is **significant** variation on the meaning of prompt words and how to interpret and carry out prompt instructions. To help multilingual writers navigate these linguistically very murky waters, faculty must first seek to understand their own use of language in their prompts and the specific expectations associated with that language. Some of these language areas include:

* **Imperative verbs used in assignment prompts, such as the commonly used verbs “explain” and “analyze.”** It is not uncommon that faculty assigning writing to students use verbs that tend to evoke informative or descriptive modes of expression rather than the higher-order critical skills that they actually expect students to demonstrate in their writing (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Humphrey & Economou, 2015).
* **The form of addressing student writers.** Research has demonstrated that certain forms of address are also helpful in eliciting particular forms of writing (i.e., second person “you” can elicit more argumentative writing, and use of information questions is more likely to elicit knowledge display writing) (Humphrey & Economou, 2015).
* **The use of multiple questions or lengthy explanations in assignment prompts.** Multilingual students often struggle to determine which questions to prioritize and/or how to organize writing (Fordesen, Gough, & Lashmet, 2019; Kroll & Reid, 1994).
* **The different emotional, societal, or educational values multilingual writers associate with certain language/modes of writing.** Even if faculty have done their utmost to be precise in their design of an assignment prompt, a multilingual writer’s cultural background will influence the way that such expectations are interpreted. This is especially true of critical and persuasive modes of expression, which may be negatively valued and thus partially or entirely avoided in the writer’s text (Cheng, 2019).

Second, for multilingual international students to become “good” writers, mentorship into their writing community is key. Mentorship involves significant investment in novice writers over an extended period of time (scaffolding) (Cotterall & Cohen, 2003; Cumming, 1995; Macbeth, 2010; Wette, 2014; Pessoa, Mitchell,Gomez-Laich, Maune, & Miller, 2019). This can include the following:

* Think-aloud modeling of writing process
* Exposure to and explanation of the usefulness and insufficiencies of model examples
* Conducting their own “authentic” research on writing conventions and their function in the disciplinary community
* Minimizing the threat of losing face through encouraging risk-taking
* Multiple revisions with extensive feedback and opportunities to negotiate understanding of that feedback
* Feedback on *target-like* writing in addition to non-target-like
* Collaboration between faculty members and multilingual writing professionals, in and out of the classroom (co-teaching, design development, dual feedback, etc.)

For writing support for multilingual students to be truly successful, then, both faculty and students must invest time and effort into understanding the ways that writing is assigned, explained, and interacted with in an American liberal arts setting. The environment that small liberal arts colleges provide is an excellent one for undertaking this work, as access to faculty members, mentorship, and advising are all hallmarks of this type of quality education. The following resources of this module provide starting points for faculty to begin to consider their assignment design, course layouts, and opportunities to scaffold multilingual writers into membership in their disciplinary writing communities.