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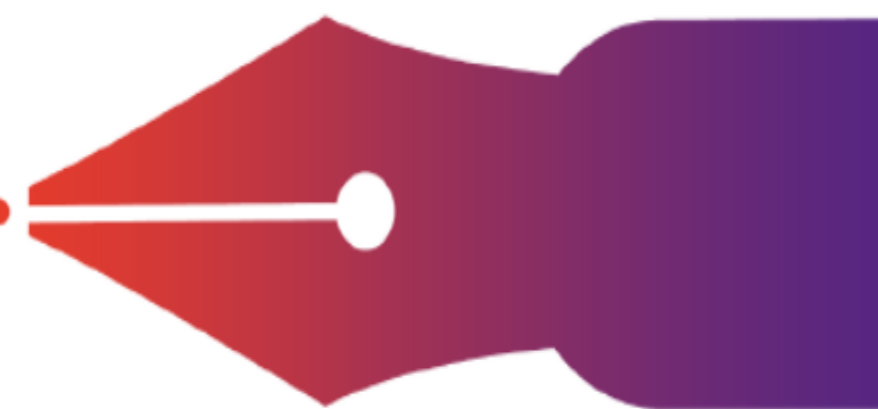


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Exploring multilingualism as a hidden resource for academic writing in Higher Education

Dr Agi Ryder and Dr Gillian Lazar

#IOEWritingSeminar



Overview

- Introductions
- Why we made the Toolkit
- Our research approach and findings
- Implications for academic writing education

[Download the Toolkit](#)





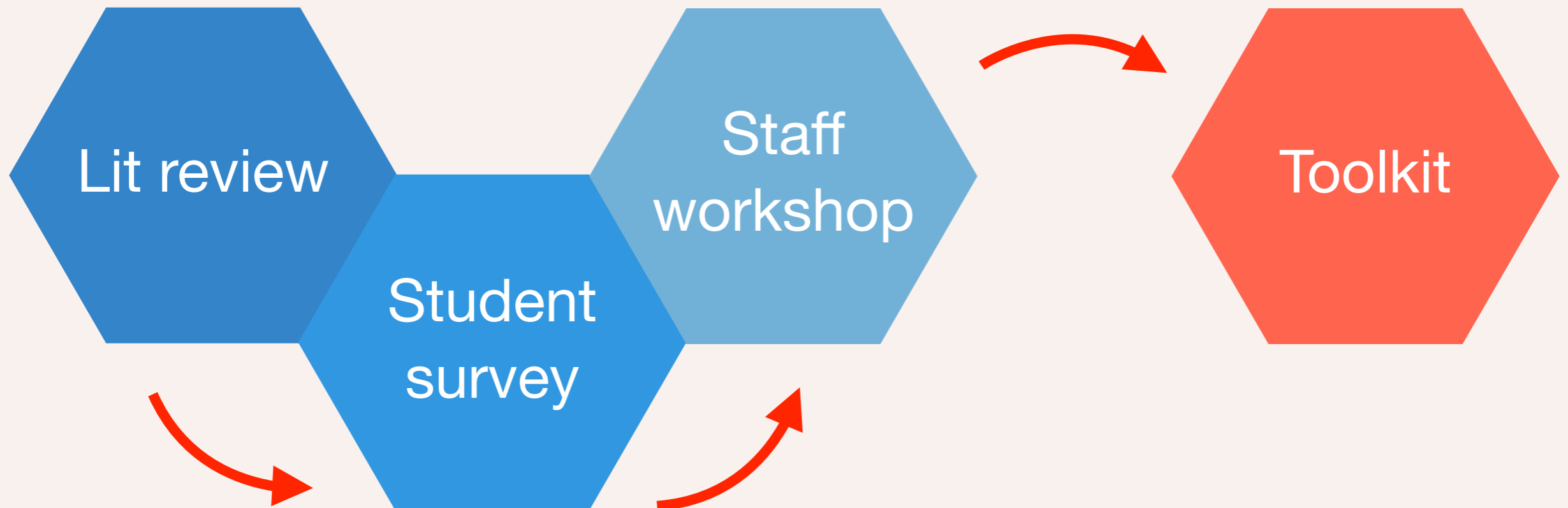
About us

We were curious

- Strong personal interest in languages
- We have already explored how educational developers can incorporate a language-aware approach to feedback when working with staff involved in learning and teaching (Lazar and Ryder, 2018)
- Mdx students and staff are multicultural and multilingual
- Uni policies have strong emphasis on EDI, but language not institutionally recognised
- On the course we noticed some academics mobilise their other languages

Inspiration for the Toolkit

- Practice-led inquiry with an emergent and flexible research approach
- Possible outcome: a research informed artefact



1. Literature review

88 relevant research papers identified:

- many relating to ML in EMI contexts, but not many relating to the UK HE
- Treated as a deficit (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Martin, 2010)
- ML advantageous for learning (Álvarez & Pérez-Cavana, 2015; Andrews & Fay, 2020; Arafat & Woodin, 2022; Davila, 2019; Liu & Fang, 2022; Marshall et al., 2019; Ndebele & Zulu, 2017)
- Translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Fang & Liu, 2020)
- Staff require support to embed ML approaches (Archila & de Mejía, 2017; Gyogi, 2022; Odeniyi & Lazar, 2020)

These studies informed the creation of the Toolkit

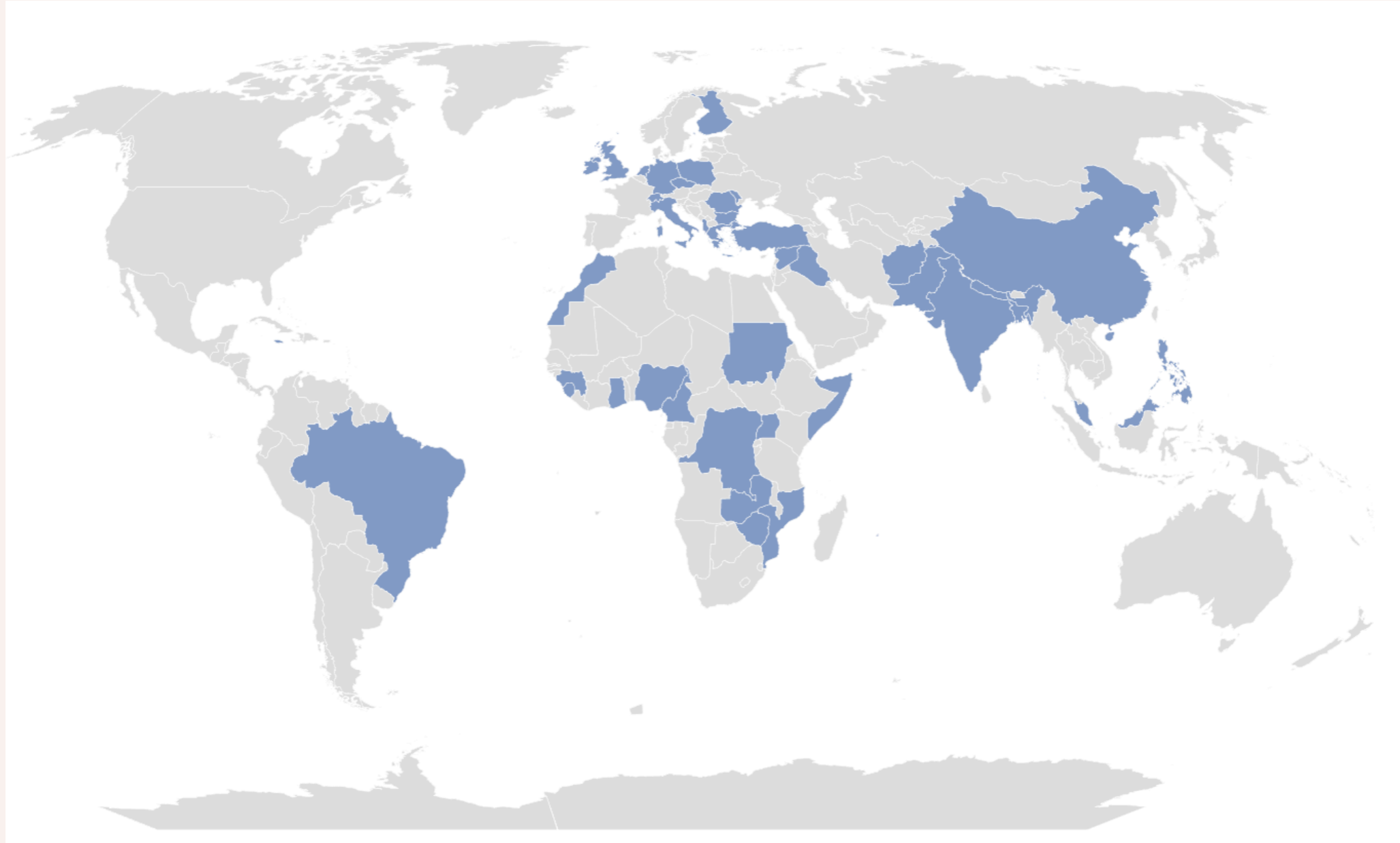
2. Student survey

145 students across 22 different programmes (e.g. Healthcare, Business, Law, Education, Science, Computing, Social Science)

We collected

1. Demographic information
2. Range of languages used in various life situations
3. Students' perception of being bi- or multilingual and implication for their studies

Where were you born?



Languages used for work, study, with family, for leisure, religion

pidgin-english luganda lozi patois russian
portuguese kurdish german ndebele punjabi
ilocano chimini bsl hausa
polish ebira cantonese french ga mandarin
urdu bulgarian bini ewe bisaya hakka local
ogbo hokkien bengali english sanskrit
malay latin fula bemba chinese nyanja
shona hindi creole albanian twi calabari dialect
tamil ghanian-language arabic adamgbe susu
malayalam italian hebrew efik gujarati nupe
nepali lingala krio greek igbo
somali idoma romanian
pashto nepalese korean

Languages used in context

- **Work and for study:** 83% only use English, but 16% also use at least another language
- **Family:** 49% do not use English, 34% English and other languages together, while only 16% uses only English
- **Friends:** 58% use English and another language, only 30% uses only English
- **Leisure and entertainment:** 45% use English and other languages
- **Religious practices:** 32% use a language other than English

Student profile 3

A student currently in Year 3, over the age of 25. The student was born in and accessed primary and secondary education in Malaysia.

The student identifies his or her mother tongues as Malay, English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Mandarin.

For study and work purposes, communicating with family and friends, leisure, and entertainment as well as religious practices, the student uses Malay, English, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Mandarin.

The student feels very comfortable and confident when using Malay and English in listening, understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. The student feels neutral when using Mandarin when listening, understanding, and speaking, but little confidence and comfort is self-reported when writing and reading.

Student strategies

If I don't understand the meaning of words in English or another language I translate it to Somali so I can understand more clearer.

Sometimes I need to look up English words in Finnish in order to understand them.

The Greek language involves medical turns which I use to help me in my adult nursing studies.

Sometimes I think in my own language in order to answer a question in English or to understand something.

I can speak to other students in that language to help me.

I use other languages to communicate and in terms of practice placement, it helped me build a therapeutic relationship with one of my patients.

3. Staff workshops

- **2 pedagogic research workshops with 17 academics:** general and language specialists
- Showed results of survey, different profiles and student strategies
- Open discussion considering these questions:
 - How can we capitalise on the multilingual nature of students?
 - What are the implications for curriculum design and classroom teaching?
 - What teaching strategies can be used to encourage students to make use of their multilingual repertoires?
 - What might be the barriers and how to overcome these?

Staff response: raising awareness of the complexities

“Just in terms of this multilingualism. I'm just thinking about it as you were speaking, actually encompasses a really wide-ranging group of people. On the glance, I mean I hadn't really considered in detail, but on a superficial level it looks like they're in a homogenous group, but actually they're not. Someone like myself, for example, who does have an additional language. I wouldn't be the same as someone, for example, who had come from a different country and had very limited use of English as their first language. I'm sure you've considered this and if I'm being really simplistic tell me to stop”.

(From staff workshop transcript, 29th June 2022)

Emerging debates

To what extent should other languages be used in British classrooms?

1. Using multiple languages

1.1.in class

1.2.for research and assignments

1.3.for placements and employability

Emerging debates

2. Concern about translation and AI

Google Translate ‘encourages a mechanistic view of language that somehow language is just a question of transmission . . . a vehicle into which you put meaning and then you send it down the tube and it comes out the other side. It’s not. I would suggest that that’s actually contrary to developing intellectual skills’.

3. Link between language use and personal identity

Implications for academic writing

Ways of acknowledging and fostering students' multilingual resources

1. Explicit support for participation in extended linguistic communities
2. Creation of 'translanguaging spaces' in the classroom
3. Use cross-linguistic comparison to encourage 'meta-level' thinking about genre
4. AI translations

1. Explicit support for participation in extended linguistic communities

“....doctoral researchers create **virtual transnational communities** through their multilingual academic writing, both in terms of academic publishing and social media platforms.”

(Langam and Sullivan 2020, p.1; see also Curry and Lillis, 2022)

HOW?

- Encouraging research using other languages (to collect data, read sources in multiple languages)
- Sharing findings with a wider audience
- Encourage masters and UG students to engage in such communities

TENSION?

- Lecturer loses control over curating source materials
- Anxiety around plagiarism and quality control
- Changes power dynamics in the classroom

2. Creation of ‘translanguaging spaces’ in the classroom

A ‘pedagogical lens’:

- “Instructional objectives and pedagogic issues connected to the development of content-specific knowledge”
- Planned by teacher

A ‘communicative lens’:

- Communication strategies of bi/multilingual students and teachers leading to hybrid and creative language use
- Natural use by students in collaborating on tasks

HOW?

- Explicitly discuss ‘study skills’ drawing on multilingualism (e.g. creating bilingual glossaries, writing notes in a mixture of languages as in Preece, 2022)
- Enabling groupwork to be conducted in more than one language

TENSION?

- Who gets included and who gets left out?

3. Use cross-linguistic comparison to encourage 'meta-level' thinking about genre

Builds on work around genre common in EAP/ Academic Literacies (e.g. Swales 1990; Bhatia 2004; Nesi and Gardner 2012)

A possible activity:

- Select a particular genre in your own language.
- What is its purpose within the context where it is found?
- Who might the author(s) be?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Does this genre have a typical structure? Can you describe the sequence of the different elements in this structure?
- Is the genre written in a particular register? (e.g. formal or informal)
- Is the author's voice present? In what ways?
- Are there any specific linguistic features associated with this genre? (e.g. type of vocabulary and grammar)

3. Use cross-linguistic comparison to encourage 'meta-level' thinking about genre

HOW?

- students work in groups describing a genre of their choice
- same questions used throughout the academic writing curriculum to explore academic genres in English (e.g. reflective narratives, lab reports, essays, etc)
- students re-evaluate their genre of choice at the end of the course, drawing on course concepts

TENSION?

- Need language specialists, not for usual lecturers
- Students might need to be convinced to go from local folk tales to serious academia
- Ongoing development, not one off session.

4. AI translations

Instead of reinforcing the inflexible and monolithic tradition of 'essay writing', academic literacies researchers argue for the opening up of the academy to new genres and practices, which accommodate students' variability of background, experience and discipline. Such 'opening up' includes a consideration of the 'out-of-college' literacies which students bring to their studies (Ivanic et al 2009; Lea and Jones 2011) as well as 'diversification of the kinds of semiotic resources that could be used for academic meaning-making' (Lillis and Tuck 2016), including juxtaposition to encourage dialogue (Lillis 2011), multi-modal approaches (Thesen 2001), promoting alternative genres for writing academically (English 2011) or creative techniques for approaching academic writing (Creme and Hunt 2002).

From Lazar, G. (2020) A writerly trajectory: reflections on published classroom resources for learners of English and students of academic writing. (Context statement for PhD by Public Works, Middlesex University)

4. AI translations

Instead of reinforcing the inflexible and monolithic tradition of 'essay writing', academic literacies researchers argue for the opening up of the academy to new genres and practices, which accommodate students' variability of background, experience and discipline. *(Original by Gillian)*

Au lieu de renforcer la tradition inflexible et monolithique de la « rédaction de dissertation », les chercheurs en littératies académiques plaident pour une ouverture de l'université à de nouveaux genres et à de nouvelles pratiques, capables de prendre en compte la diversité des parcours, des expériences et des disciplines des étudiants. *(Chat GPT)*

Au lieu de perpétuer la tradition rigide et monolithique de la dissertation, les chercheurs en littératie universitaire plaident pour une ouverture du monde académique à de nouveaux genres et pratiques, qui tiennent compte de la diversité des parcours, des expériences et des disciplines des étudiants. *(Google Translate)*

Au lieu de renforcer la tradition rigide et monolithique de la « rédaction d'essais », les chercheurs en littératies académiques plaident pour l'ouverture de l'université à de nouveaux genres et pratiques, qui tiennent compte de la variabilité des origines, des expériences et des disciplines des étudiants. *(Claude - Anthropic)*

Contact us

We'd love to continue this conversation so please reach out to us:

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The Inclusive Multilingualism Toolkit for Educators is available online at <https://doi.org/10.60528/1x1297>

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Q&A

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