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1

INTRODUCTION

This Is Where It Begins

- Juan: Teacher, I wanted to let you know that I took English 101 last semester.
- Tanita: Hmm . . . Why are you in my class, instead of English 102?
- Juan: My English 101 teacher told me that English 108 would be better for me.
- Tanita: Sounds good to me.

It was a brief conversation between my student and me after our first class meeting ended; it was also the first time I learned about *placement*. Juan was originally from Puerto Rico, and he took my English 108 (a second-semester first-year writing course designed for students whose first or strongest language is not English) in Fall 2009 at Arizona State University (ASU).¹

To be honest, as a graduate teaching assistant, I did not know how to respond to the student at that moment, so I just said, “sounds good to me,” as a way to acknowledge his reply to my question. After Juan left, I asked myself many questions: how did Juan end up in a mainstream composition course in the first place? Why did he decide to take English 101? What went into his placement decision process? Juan’s (mis?) placement case, together with a quest for answers to my own questions, was the jumping-off point for my research into the placement of multilingual writers² into college composition courses and also the origin of this book. Multilingual writers mentioned in this book include international visa students and US residents or citizens who are non-native English speaking students. In the remainder of this book, when I refer to the two groups of these

multilingual writers, I will use “international multilingual” and “resident multilingual.”

Five years later, I have experienced similar placement cases. As the director of English as a second language (ESL) at my current institution, I have always received email inquiries from students like the one below:

My name is Vincent Prezer. I am currently a sophomore. I need assistance with my writing since English is my second language. I spoke with the English Department and I was told to speak to you to see what courses I should take to improve my writing.

I met with Vincent, a US citizen student, to discuss his placement, and I learned that he previously took English 101. I informed the student what options he had for a second-semester first-year writing course, explaining to him differences and similarities between English 102 and English 132, an equivalent of 102 specifically designed for multilingual students. I did not tell the student what course he should take but let him decide based on information he received from me. Two weeks later, the student emailed me, letting me know that he decided to take English 132.

The anecdotal accounts of Juan and Vincent are not new to writing program administrators (WPAs). Their placement experiences are a single pattern, or at least two overlapping ones: a student takes mainstream composition but is then steered by a teacher away from English 102 because it has been discovered that the student is a multilingual writer. It seems that the students were sort of aimless and passive, being moved around by various authority figures at their universities, when questions we should really be asking are what the students themselves want, how they can make well-informed placement decisions, and exercise their own agency in their placement decisions instead of just doing what others tell them. As yet, we have lacked empirical evidence to explain such placement experiences as well as the placement of multilingual students into college composition courses in particular.

Second language (L2) writing research and writing studies discussion on first-year composition placement has informed

us about and allowed us to understand multilingual writers' placement perceptions and their preferences for enrolling in multilingual composition over mainstream composition or vice versa (e.g., Braine 1996; Chiang and Schmida 1999; Harklau 2000; Costino and Hyon 2007; Ortmeier-Hooper 2008; Ruecker 2011). Yet, as WPAs continue to determine appropriate placement for multilingual students in order to meet their differing needs, what is learned from research into placement preferences and perceptions may not be sufficient. One main reason is that we have neglected to understand *how* multilingual students make decisions about placement into mainstream or multilingual composition courses. As illustrated by the cases of Juan and Vincent, we do not know *how* they ended up being in English 101 and *what* went into their placement decision process, among others. Students' placement decisions, I argue, are fundamental and need to be fully examined, mainly because those decisions can determine students' "success or failure" (Braine 1996, 91) in first-year college writing courses.

This book demonstrates why looking at students' placement decisions is an important element for developing and improving placement practices for multilingual writers in college composition programs. It primarily explores how multilingual students exercise *agency* in their placement decisions and how *student agency* can inform the overall programmatic placement of multilingual students in college composition programs. Specifically, the book follows 11 multilingual students who made their decisions about placement into mainstream or multilingual first-year composition courses over the course of one academic year at ASU, a large public university located in the Southwest of the United States. It argues why we need to understand multilingual students' placement decision-making process more clearly and describes how we should use what we have learned about that process to improve placement practices for multilingual students, particularly how we advise students about placement.

I focus on the placement decisions of multilingual writers because these writers are regularly presenting in institutions of US higher education. According to the Institute of International

Education (IIE)'s "2015 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange" released on November 16, 2015, "the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities had the highest rate of growth in 35 years, increasing by ten percent to a record high of 974, 926 students in the 2014/2015 academic year" ("2015 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange" 2015). With this sharply increasing number of international multilingual students, plus a regular presence of resident multilingual students³ in college composition programs, it is essential that WPAs and writing teachers take "responsibility for the regular presence of second language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, and to *develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs*" (CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers 2009, para. 4; emphasis mine). My research is conducted with multilingual writers at one institution; yet I believe the placement issues examined here are relevant to other student populations, including multilingual and monolingual, in other contexts and settings.

The rest of this chapter develops exigencies of my research and lays the groundwork for the subsequent chapters: establishing the significance of students' placement decisions; proposing a definition of agency developed from a synthesis of existing discussions of theory of agency and my own research data; and examining different placement methods and their relation to student agency. A theory of agency I develop will be illustrated through the stories of the 11 multilingual writers in the remainder of this book and elaborated in chapter 7. The last part of this current chapter introduces the research context and participants and ends with an overview of the remaining chapters.

WHY MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS' PLACEMENT DECISIONS?

One of my main goals as a WPA, like other WPAs, is to ensure appropriate course placement for students' success in writing courses. We have pondered over placement-related questions like how placement should be decided, what method should

be used, and how placement outcomes should be assessed. In the meantime, as Marcia Lee Ribble (2002) points out, “more and more composition programs are looking at their placement practices as inadequate to explain student failure. There have been a number of attempts to increase student success and student retention, by developing placement practices that are directly linked to improved writing pedagogies” (13).

One such attempt includes adopting various placement methods in order to guarantee placement that can meet students’ learning and writing needs. These placement methods are: standardized test scores (indirect assessment), a single timed-writing sample (direct assessment), portfolios, and directed self-placement (Peckham 2009). A combination of these methods has also been used in many writing programs, such as standardized test scores and a timed-writing essay, or standardized test scores and directed self-placement (Huot 1994; Williams 1995; Peckham 2009). Placement methods vary from institution to institution based on institutional contexts and local needs. Writing programs use these placement methods to place students, including multilingual students, into different first-year composition course options. Particularly, there are four placement options, as described by Tony Silva (1994), for multilingual students. The first option is to place multilingual writers in mainstream composition classes with native users of English. Another approach is to create a separate section of first-year composition designated for multilingual writers. It is possible that multilingual writers can be placed in the same class with native English-speaking basic writers who need extra time to develop their academic writing skills. Multilingual students can also be placed in a cross-cultural composition class in which a more or less equal number of native English-speaking students and non-native English-speaking students are systematically integrated (see a more nuanced discussion in Matsuda and Silva 1999; see also Jordan 2012; Miller-Cochran 2012).

The placement itself is complex. Placement is made even more complicated by conflicting results of research (Sullivan and Nielsen 2009) that has looked into multilingual students’

placement perceptions and preferences (Braine 1996; Chiang and Schmida 1999; Costino and Hyon 2007; Ortmeier-Hooper 2008). To illustrate, George Braine's (1996) study showed that a majority of ESL students (international and resident non-native English students) preferred to enroll in ESL classes to mainstream classes. The study also reported that students who enrolled in ESL classes performed better in an exit exam than those enrolled in mainstream sections. A study by Kimberly Costino and Sunny Hyon echoes Braine's conclusion that L2 students prefer ESL writing classes (Costino and Hyon 2007). In the Costino and Hyon study, international students and US-born resident immigrants preferred the multilingual section. One possible reason might be that they felt comfortable working with their non-native English-speaking friends who were like them. Another reason might be the teachers, who were well trained and knew how to work effectively with them. Contrarily, L2 students (US resident L2 students referred to as Generation 1.5 students) in a study by Yuet-Sim Chiang and Mary Schmida resisted being in ESL writing classes because they did not associate themselves with the ESL label of those first-year composition sections (Chiang and Schmida 1999). Like the US resident L2 students in Chiang and Schmida's (1999) study, an ESL immigrant student in a study by Christina Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) did not like being "classified as an 'ESL' student" (397). This student chose to be enrolled in an honors section of first-year composition and ignored an ESL section because he did not consider himself to be an ESL student. These situations are likely to happen, as Linda Blanton (1999) points out, because when US resident L2 students "reach college, they may feel strongly that they shouldn't be placed differently from other U.S. high school graduates, and are offended when labeled *ESL*" (123; emphasis in original).

In summary, these conflicting placement preferences and perceptions make it more difficult to understand the placement of multilingual writers into first-year composition courses. This book is an attempt to build this understanding, and I hope to do so through the stories of the 11 multilingual writers who

made their decisions about placement into mainstream or multilingual first-year composition courses.

AGENCY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before presenting an operationalized definition of agency, I address different views about agency and so argue that there is no consensus on agency. What is currently known is just a bewildering array of competing definitions. To begin, let's consider general definitions of agency, which involve an act. Anthropologist Laura Ahearn (2001) defines agency as follows: "Agency is the socioculturally mediated capacity to act," and she considers it to be a "provisional definition" (122). For British Marxist historian and writer Perry Anderson (1980), agency is a "conscious, goal-directed activity" (19). In my view, there is a link between agency and action, but this idea is complicated by other developing definitions of agency (I discuss this complication in the following paragraphs). As a result, it makes agency tricky and difficult to define; this seems to be in agreement in both applied linguistics and rhetoric studies (Hauser 2004; van Lier 2009).

In applied linguistics, Leo van Lier, among others, notes that a delineation of agency is "far from straightforward" (van Lier 2009, xii), and it is difficult to make a distinction between agency and autonomy and other related constructs, including self and identity. According to van Lier, if "self is basically anything and everything we call 'me' or 'I'" (Harter 1999, quoted in van Lier 2009, x), agency, which involves an act, can be equally looked at from the two ends of a continuum. On one end, "agency refers to the ways in which, and the extents to which, the person (self, identities, and all) is compelled to, motivated to, allowed to, and coerced to, *act*" (van Lier 2009, x; emphasis in original). On the other end, "agency refers equally to the person deciding to, wanting to, insisting to, agreeing to, and negotiating to, *act*" (van Lier 2009, x; emphasis in original). These definitions of agency by van Lier capture "nicely the complexities of the notion of agency" (van Lier 2009, x).

In rhetoric, Gerard Hauser (2004) suggests that there are divergences of what constitutes agency, and how it should be conceptualized. These divergences, however, have led to various developing definitions of agency and each has emphasized differing features of agency. For example, Amanda Young (2008), based on results of her study of teenage girls who were interacting with a computer program about safe sex, describes that “agency entails planning and decision-making. It also requires self-evaluation and the recognition of internal and external expertise. Agency is constructed and expressed in how people manage conflicts and design plans for change that acknowledge people’s beliefs and readiness to change behavior if warranted” (244).

Young also suggests the fundamental properties of agency, which include questioning, negotiation, choice, and evaluation (228). For other scholars, these properties are considered to be resources for agency (e.g., Callinicos 1988, 236; Flannery 1991, 702). Nick Turnbull (2004) considers agency to be a property of questioning and suggests the following: “Where there is choice there is agency” (207). Kathryn Flannery (1991) takes a step further and comments that “choice is itself a resource to which agents have different access” (702); and agents can choose not to make use of resources that are out there. Flannery also notes that it is agents who “possess the potential to act or not act contingent upon their ‘relative access to productive resources’” (Callinicos 1988, 236, quoted in Flannery 1991, 702).

Karlyn Campbell (2005), based on her analysis of the text created by a white woman 12 years after Sojourner Truth’s speech in 1851, proposes that agency “(1) is communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is ‘invented’ by authors who are points of articulations; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal” (2).

The notion of agency, as asserted by Amy Koerber (2006), has a component of resistance. This claim of Koerber is built from her technical communication analysis of interviews with

breastfeeding advocates who support breastfeeding mothers and assist them when they encounter problems. Koerber's interviewees said that mothers had to resist other elements of medical discourse and cultural perceptions that contradicted official medical guidelines on breastfeeding. Mothers' acts of resistance, as Koerber suggests, are "the kind of rhetorical negotiation that might be construed as the occupation of preexisting subject positions rather than true resistance" (88). More important, the acts, in the context of this study, "begin as active selection among discursive alternatives" (88).

Operationalized Definition of Agency

I maintain the idea of the link between agency and acts. I also see that there must be factors that make agency possible and so consider such factors to be conditions for agency. In the interest of multilingual students' placement decisions, I develop an operationalized definition of agency, employing it as a theoretical lens to understand student agency and how it can help improve placement practices for multilingual students in college composition courses. My operationalized definition of agency reads as follows: *Agency is the capacity to act or not to act, contingent upon various conditions.*

In the context of this book, conditions for agency include freedom to choose writing courses and information about placement that was distributed through the following sources: academic advisors' recommendations, other students' past experiences in taking first-year composition courses, new student orientation, and other sources that provided placement related information (see appendix C). I developed these constructs during the process of data analysis and of writing this book.

I should also note that the capacity to act with respect to placement in a first-year writing course is valuable—even if, for instance, it opens up the risk that a student might make a poor placement decision, by overestimating her/his writing skills, taking a particular course for social rather than academic reasons (see Crusan 2006 in the next pages).

PLACEMENT METHODS AND STUDENT AGENCY

I discussed earlier that writing programs, varying from institution to institution, place students into writing courses using different placement methods, including standardized test scores (indirect assessment), a single timed-writing sample (direct assessment), portfolios, and directed self-placement (Peckham 2009). A combination of these methods has also been used in many writing programs such as standardized test scores and a timed-writing essay (Huot 1994; Williams 1995; Peckham 2009). My goal in the next pages is to critically review some of the major findings of research on assessment and placement in order to demonstrate a relationship between placement methods and student agency. In the end, I argue that these placement methods work against or interfere with student agency.

Research has told us that timed-writing essays and standardized test scores are the most widely used methods to determine placement for students. To illustrate, results of Brian Huot's (1994) nationwide survey of writing placement practices of 1,037 public and private institutions indicated that a timed-writing sample was the most widely used placement method (51%), followed by standardized test scores (ACT or SAT) (42%), and a combination of a timed-writing essay and standardized test scores (23%). Huot's survey echoed a previous study by Karen Greenberg, Harvey Wiener, and Richard Donovan, which demonstrated that the majority of institutions used a placement essay to determine English placement (Greenberg, Wiener, and Donovan 1986). On the contrary, Jessica Williams's (1995) nationwide survey of 78 colleges and universities showed that direct assessment like a placement essay (23%) was not as widely used as indirect assessment (58%) for deciding placement for ESL students, when combining the percentages of an institutionally administered indirect test (32%) and TOEFL scores (26%). A combination of standardized test scores and a timed-writing essay was also found (19%).

The use of timed-writing samples or placement essays versus the use of standardized test scores for placement has long been a heated discussion in placement and assessment. Advocates for

direct assessment like the National Testing Network in Writing and the National Council of Teachers of English recommend using timed-writing samples for placing students into writing courses (Gordon 1987). This practice is also preferred by language assessment specialists (e.g., White 1994, quoted in Crusan 2002; Ferretti 2001; Crusan and Cornett 2002) who advocate essay tests because “they are able to gauge the ability of students to identify and analyze problems, to identify audience and purpose, to argue, describe, and define, skills that are valued in composition classes in the United States” (Crusan 2002, 19). Yet research has shown that the use of a timed-writing sample “has been defined as preferable if only one measure for placement into composition courses will be used, and if the only alternative is a multiple-choice test” (Matzen and Hoyt 2004, 3). Multiple-choice tests have been criticized because they “isolate and evaluate knowledge of specific components of language” (Crusan 2002, 19).

Supporters of the use of standardized test scores like Barbara Gordon argue that “standardized tests are more accurate than a single writing sample for placing students,” explaining that “[. . .] with regard to validity and reliability, a single writing sample is among the most unacceptable means to place students” (Gordon 1987, 29). Other advocates for standardized test scores also question the reliability and validity of writing samples’ results (e.g., Huot 1990; Belanoff 1991; Elbow 1997). While Hunter Breland (1977) points out that a writing sample is not a useful indicator of a student’s writing ability compared to an objective assessment, Pearl Saunders (2000) suggests that writing samples are not necessary for accurate placement. Because of the limitations of both timed-writing essays and standardized test scores, assessment specialists (e.g., Leki 1991; Haswell 1998; Crusan 2002) have considered other strategies for placing students into writing courses. Deborah Crusan (2002), for example, particularly recommends using multiple instruments (a combination of direct and indirect assessment) as a means to place multilingual writers into first-year writing courses.

The use of portfolios is another placement method employed in US writing programs. In this placement means, high school teachers help students develop their portfolios before submitting them to writing programs at particular institutions for assessment. Since the portfolio system is impractical for international and out-of-state students, it has not been widely used as the placement method for international students (P. K. Matsuda, pers. comm.)

In view of the limitations of standardized test scores, placement essays, and portfolios, the implementation of an alternative placement method called directed self-placement (DSP) at Grand Valley State University (Royer and Gilles 1998, 2003) attracted the attention of several writing programs nationwide. DSP informs students about appropriate and accurate information on available first-year writing courses as well as advantages and disadvantages of taking those courses. Since Royer and Gilles's groundbreaking article, "Directed Self-Placement: An Attitude of Orientation," appeared in *College Composition and Communication* in 1998, many institutions have become interested in DSP and have adopted it as a placement procedure in lieu of traditional placement methods. Since DSP refuses to make placement decisions for students, it fosters student agency by forcing students to choose a writing course they believe is right for them.

Royer and Gilles discuss DSP in the context of first language (L1) composition. In the context of second language (L2) writing, the use of DSP as a placement method originally excludes L2 writers (Crusan 2006). As explained by Crusan (2006), resistance to an inclusion of L2 writers in DSP by her L2 writing colleagues stems from their beliefs that L2 students are prone to make poor decisions about their language proficiency. L2 writers, some believe, either overestimate or underestimate themselves; as a consequence, they may place themselves into a course that is above or below their level of proficiency. In contrast, a study by Diane Strong-Krause (2000) suggests that L2 students will be able to self-evaluate if self-assessment instruments are carefully developed and appropriately implemented.

It has been argued that DSP probably comes with disadvantages if students are not well informed about writing courses that are available to them and about advantages and disadvantages of taking those courses. Furthermore, in a situation in which students cannot make appropriate decisions about placement, they may end up being in a writing course that does not fit their writing ability and proficiency. As pointed out by Ellen Schendel and Peggy O'Neill, "directed self-placement may not work in some contexts, as students may misjudge their writing abilities" (Schendel and O'Neill 1999, 218). Schendel and O'Neill base their criticism on psychological research by Justin Kruger and David Dunning, which suggests that undergraduate students tend to misjudge their performance and they do not necessarily possess self-evaluation skills when they first arrive at college (Kruger and Dunning 1999).

To mitigate these probable disadvantages of DSP as a placement method, Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson, Jeff Sommers, and John Paul Tassoni from Miami University, Middletown campus (an open-admissions institution) create a writing placement process called the Writer's Profile in which students are engaged in "self-reflection and teachers incorporate knowledge gained into their classrooms and curricula" (Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni 2000, 172), but in the end teachers are the ones who decide course placement for students. For Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni, "the best placement decisions would be reached both through student self-reflection *and* assessment from those [teachers] who know the curriculum" (168; emphasis in original).

Building on the previous work by Kathleen Yancey (1992) and Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson (1995, 1996), the Writer's Profile, which is developed based on the same concept of portfolios, consists of multiple types of student writing such as lists, notes, drafts, and revisions (Grego and Thompson 1995, 1996). Students work on their Writer's Profile at home and self-select pieces of writing to include in the profile. Two writing teachers evaluate the Writer's Profile. When an agreement is reached, course placement is suggested to each student. In

the Writer's Profile, students are asked to complete multiple tasks. In the prewriting stage, students are first asked to write down the first thing that comes into their head about all of the writing they have done in the last month or so. Second, they are asked to respond to a different question about the writing they have done in school. Third, they respond to another question about writing in college, particularly their goals for writing in college and about what they think writing in college will be like. In the drafting stage, students use the information they have from their prewriting to compose a two- to three-page Writer's Profile, a portrait of themselves as writers. Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni (2000) believe that the Writer's Profile can help students and their advisors "make more informed choices about course placement" (166) because both students' actual writing and teachers' placement recommendations are used to decide course placement for students. A rationale behind the Writer's Profile, as noted by Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni is that "placement should not be something we do to or *for* students, but something we do *with* students" (173; emphasis in original).

In the final analysis, when writing programs or institutions use standardized test scores, timed-writing samples, and portfolios, they all use scores to determine placement for students. Clearly, these three placement methods do not seem to allow room for student agency unless students study hard and decide to retake a test for a better score—this applies to the use of standardized test scores as a placement method. DSP and the Writer's Profile are different; they are designed to maximize student agency. As I discussed earlier, while DSP grants full agency to students and believes that placement should be a student's own choice (Royer and Gilles 1998), the Writer's Profile allows students to act as agents who self-reflect on their writing; writing teachers assess students' reflections and decide an appropriate writing course for them (Lewiecki-Wilson, Sommers, and Tassoni 2000).

Systematically, DSP presents conditions for agency by providing placement information and placement options to students;

in the end students are the ones who get to decide what writing course they will take. It is clear that conditions for agency are built into the DSP system. In the use of standardized test scores, conditions for agency are not built into its system. Yet, it does not mean that agency cannot or does not exist in the system of standardized test scores when various placement options are made available to students and students have the freedom to choose writing courses. This book explores, among other things, how conditions for agency are distributed in the context of (many) typical US writing programs where test scores are used as a means to place multilingual students into first-year composition courses.

THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

This research was conducted in the writing program at ASU between Fall 2010 and Spring 2011. Recognized as one of the largest writing programs in the country, the writing program enrolls both native users of English and multilingual students. Housed in the English Department, the writing program offers a variety of placement options for first-year composition courses.⁴ There are two main tracks of first-year composition: mainstream and multilingual. Each track has different levels of first-year writing courses, ranging from developmental to advanced composition, for students to choose from. Table 1.1 shows the placement options that are available to students.

For the mainstream track, the writing program offers the two-semester first-year writing sequence (ENG 101 and ENG 102), the stretch first-year writing course (WAC 101),⁵ which stretches the first-year writing course (ENG 101) over two semesters, and the advanced composition (ENG 105), which is a one semester writing course that can satisfy the first-year writing requirement. For the multilingual track, the writing program offers the two-semester first-year writing sequence (ENG 107 and ENG 108), which is equivalent to ENG 101 and ENG 102. Like WAC 101, WAC 107 stretches the first-year writing course (ENG 107) over two semesters.

Table 1.1. Placement Options

	<i>Mainstream</i>	<i>Multilingual</i>
Advanced Composition	ENG 105	No course offered
First-Year Composition II	ENG 102	ENG 108 (English for Foreign Students*)
First-Year Composition I	ENG 101	ENG 107 (English for Foreign Students*)
Stretch Composition	WAC 101 (Introduction to Academic Writing)	WAC 107 ((Introduction to Academic Writing for Foreign Students*)

*Beginning in Fall 2012, the course title of ENG 107 and ENG 108 was changed to First-Year Composition and that of WAC 107 was changed to Introduction to Academic Writing.

The writing program places students into first-year writing courses using standardized test scores, such as SAT, ACT, TOEFL, and IELTS. In a situation that students do not have test scores or are not satisfied with their test scores, they have an option to take the Accuplacer Test (The WritePlacer section), a placement test for a first-year English course administered by the University Testing and Scanning Services. Students can take this test only once. Table 1.2 shows test score cutoff points and course placement.⁶

Placement information is communicated to students by academic advisors. Incoming students meet their academic advisors before each fall semester starts during new student orientation, which takes place between March and early July. Students register for classes, including a first-year writing class, during the orientation. Some international students holding student visas register for classes online, including a first-year writing class, when they are in their home countries. They contact academic advisors via email asking for advice on enrollment. Others wait until they arrive to campus and register. Communication about placement information to international students is minimal. They primarily rely on recommendations from academic advisors. Before and during the time of this research (Fall 2010–Spring 2011), there had been no formal communication about first-year composition placement between the writing program and writing teachers.

Table 1.2. Test Scores and Course Placement

<i>Placement Exam</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Course</i>
SAT Verbal	460 and below	WAC 101 or 107
ACT English	18 or below	WAC 101 or 107
Accuplacer	7 or below (12-point system) / 4 or below (8-point system, effective Fall 2009)	WAC 101 or WAC 107
TOEFL	Below 560PBT/220CBT/83iBT	WAC 107
SAT Verbal	470–610	ENG 101 or ENG 107
ACT English	19–25	ENG 101 or ENG 107
Accuplacer	8–10 (12-point system) / 5–7 (8-point system, effective Fall 2009)	ENG 101 or ENG 107
TOEFL	560PBT/220CBT/83iBT and above	ENG 101 or ENG 107
SAT Verbal	620 or more	ENG 105
ACT English	26 or more	ENG 105
Accuplacer	11 or more (12-point system) / 8 (8-point system, effective Fall 2009)	ENG 105

In each fall semester, the writing program offers about five hundred or more sections of writing courses—this includes first-year writing courses and other higher-level writing courses for undergraduate students. For each spring semester, the number of sections is reduced to about four hundred sections or so. During the time of this research, the writing program offered 426 sections of first-year composition courses (out of 544 sections of all writing courses) in Fall 2010. The total number of students enrolled in first-year writing course was 8,258. In Spring 2011, 322 sections (out of 443 sections of all writing courses) of first-year writing courses were offered. The total number of students was 5,867.

I should note that the ASU writing program has two WPAs: Director of Writing Programs and Director of Second Language Writing. While the former is in charge of the mainstream composition, the latter is in charge of multilingual composition.

RESEARCH DESIGN

I conducted an interview-based qualitative study (see appendix B for interview questions) in the studied writing program over the course of one academic year (Fall 2010–Spring 2011). The goal was to address the primary research questions as follows:

1. How do multilingual writers make the decisions about placement into mainstream or multilingual first-year composition courses?
2. How do multilingual writers exercise agency in their placement decisions?
3. What is the role of academic advisors and writing teachers regarding multilingual writers' placement decisions?
4. How can the placement policy/procedure be developed in order to maximize student agency?

I carried out a series of four in-depth interviews informed by Irving Seidman's (2006) model called "in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing" (15) with 11 multilingual undergraduate writers from various language backgrounds. I interviewed each of the students two times in Fall 2010 and two more times in Spring 2011. In this interview approach, open-ended questions are used in order to encourage participants to reconstruct their experience under the topic of the study. In my research, I used semi-structured questions, which I found helpful for students when they did not have anything to say. The questions helped both the students and me continue the conversation. I often asked follow-up questions that were not listed. This type of interview allowed me to closely follow individual multilingual writers, which helped me understand each of them thoroughly. It also allowed me to understand why they did what they did. From the first interview to the fourth interview, the student participants became more comfortable sharing with me their English placement experiences. Information gained from each interview helped develop an understanding of each student's whole placement decision processes and what went into their decisions about taking first-year writing courses.

I also carried out one-time interviews with some of the multilingual student participants' academic advisors and writing teachers to gain their perspectives on the placement of multilingual writers into college composition courses. Furthermore, I interviewed the director of Writing Programs and the director of Second Language Writing twice in order to obtain information about the writing program's placement policies and other related issues, as well as information about changes that have been made to the placement policies after my research was completed. In addition to the interviews, I examined online information related to first-year English composition placement from the English Department's website, the writing program's website, the university's new student orientation 2010 website, and the University Testing and Scanning Services' website. I also collected related documents, such as major maps and DARS (Degree Audit Reporting System).⁷

After completion of data collection, I informally analyzed interview transcripts at a transcribing stage where summaries and notes were typed. Formal analysis began when the transcripts were coded. Coding and data analysis (see appendix C) was guided by the operationalized definition of agency discussed earlier. The theory of agency that I developed was used as a theoretical lens when analyzing student interview data. My coding and data analysis was also guided by the established research questions. I was also open for emerging themes and patterns. Data analysis was a recursive process, and it continued throughout the process of writing this book.

Meet the Participants

Multilingual Students

The 11 multilingual students (see appendix A) participating in my research came from various language backgrounds, countries, and disciplines. They included two US citizens, two permanent residents, and seven international visa students; five females, six males; aged eighteen to thirty when they first enrolled at ASU; from the United States, China, Norway,

Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar; studying political science, industrial engineering, mechanical engineering, computer information systems, business communication, business management, economics, mathematics and statistics, and mathematics and film. While two student participants were enrolled in mainstream composition sections, the rest were enrolled in multilingual composition sections. Following are the brief introductions of the multilingual student participants with their pseudonyms, test scores, and English course placement. This information is summarized in table 1.3. Other detailed descriptions of each student participant are enriched in chapters 3–5 when I present the student case studies.

- *Jasim* is a 19-year-old visa student from Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). He scored 6.5 on IELTS and was enrolled in ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.
- *Joel* is a 30-year-old US permanent resident from Mexico. He scored 542 on PBT (paper-based test) TOEFL. He took WAC 107, followed by ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.
- *Marco* is an 18-year-old US citizen from Mexico. He scored 480 on SAT Verbal and registered for ENG 101 and ENG 102, respectively.
- *Chan* is a 22-year-old visa student from China. She scored 90 on the iBT (Internet-based test) TOEFL and registered for ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.
- *Jonas*^s is a visa student from Norway. He scored 77 on iBT and was originally placed into WAC 107. He took the Accuplacer Test and scored 5 out of 8 on the WritePlacer section and was able to take ENG 107.
- *Afia* is a 22-year-old US permanent resident from Qatar. She scored 76 on iBT TOEFL and was originally placed into WAC 107. She took the Accuplacer Test and scored 5 and was able to enroll in ENG 107.
- *Pascal* is a 20-year-old visa student originally from France. He scored 102 on iBT TOEFL and was enrolled in ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.
- *Mei* is a 20-year-old visa student from China. She scored 6.5 on IELTS and was enrolled in ENG 107, followed by ENG 108.
- *Ana* is an 18-year-old US citizen student from the United States. She scored 26 on her ACT English; with this score,

Table 1.3 Multilingual Student Participants

<i>Student</i>	<i>Country / native language</i>	<i>Length of time in the US</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Residency status</i>	<i>Test score</i>	<i>Course placement</i>
Jasim	United Arab Emirates / Arabic	Almost 2 years	19	International visa student	6.5 (IELTS)	ENG 107 and 108
Joel	Mexico / Spanish	3 years	30	US permanent resident (from marriage)	542 (TOEFL PBT)	WAC 107, ENG 107 and 108
Marco	Mexico / Spanish	13 years	18	US citizen	480 (SAT Verbal)	ENG 101 and 102
Chan	China / Chinese	Almost 1 year	22	International visa student	90 (TOEFL iBT)	ENG 107 and 108
Jonas	Norway / Norwegian	2 months	NA	International visa student	77 (TOEFL iBT)	ENG 107 and 108
Afia	Qatar / Arabic	1.5 years	22	US permanent resident	76 (TOEFL iBT)	ENG 107 and 108
Pascal	France / French	9 months	20	International visa student	102 (TOEFL iBT)	ENG 107 and 108
Mei	China / Chinese	7 months	20	International visa student	6.5 (IELTS)	ENG 107 and 108
Ana	United States / Spanish	Entire life (18 years)	18	US citizen	26 (ACT English)	ENG 101 and 102
Askar	Kazakhstan / Kazakh	3 years	19	International visa student	96 (TOEFL iBT)	107 and 108
Ting	China / Chinese	8 months	20	International visa student	84 (TOEFL iBT)	ENG 107 and 108

she could enroll in ENG 105. Ana, however, registered for ENG 101 and ENG 102, respectively.

- *Askar* is a 19-year-old visa student from Kazakhstan. He scored 96 on iBT TOEFL and was enrolled in ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.

- *Ting* is a 20-year-old visa student from China. She scored 84 on iBT TOEFL and was enrolled in ENG 107 and ENG 108, respectively.

Academic Advisors

The four academic advisors were full-time academic advisors (non-faculty advisors) from electrical engineering, business administration, mathematics and statistics, and economics. They were academic advisors of some of the multilingual student participants. They were two males and two females; they had years of advising experience ranging from two to six years. Each had a few years of experience in working with multilingual students at this institution. Below is their brief background information:

- *Jerry* is an academic advisor for electrical engineering majors. He has six years of advising experience.
- *Keith* is an academic advisor for business administration students and has worked with a few multilingual students in the past.
- *Elaine* is an academic advisor for economics majors and has five years of experience in student advising. She has also taught economics for undergraduate students at the same time.
- *Megan* is an academic advisor for mathematics and statistics majors and has two years of advising experience.

Writing Teachers

Like the academic advisor participants, the five writing teachers were instructors of the focal multilingual students. Two taught both mainstream and multilingual composition, two taught only multilingual composition, and one taught only mainstream composition. Two were graduate teaching assistants, two were full-time instructors, and one was an adjunct instructor. While two writing teachers never had L2 writing training, the rest did. Their experience in teaching in the writing program ranged from three years to almost 10 years. Their information is as follows:

- *Beverly* is an adjunct instructor. She taught two sections of ENG 107, two sections of ENG 108, and one section of ENG 102 in Fall 2010. Throughout her three years at this institution, she has had experience teaching both multilingual and mainstream composition. She earned a master's degree in TESOL and used to tutor non-native English speakers.
- *Sammy* is a full-time instructor, and she taught two sections of ENG 107 and two sections of ENG 105 in Fall 2010. For almost 10 years, she has been teaching both multilingual and mainstream composition in the writing program. Sammy earned a PhD in English. She used to teach English at the university level in Japan for nine years. When she returned to the United States, she began privately tutoring international multilingual students. She never had L2 writing training but learned to teach L2 writing in the classroom.
- *Anne*, a doctoral student in rhetoric, composition, and linguistics, is a graduate teaching assistant and taught two sections of ENG 107 in Fall 2010. A fifth year TA, she had taught both mainstream and multilingual composition. Prior to coming to ASU, she had L2 writing training and taught English speaking in India and at a university in Portland.
- *Ethan*, a doctoral student in rhetoric, composition, and linguistics, is a graduate teaching assistant and taught two sections of ENG 107 in Fall 2010. He earned a master's degree in TESOL and had L2 writing training.
- *Dan* is a full-time instructor and taught five sections of ENG 101 in Fall 2010. He earned a PhD in English Education. Over the past six years (the first three years as a teaching assistant and the rest as an instructor) of teaching in the writing program, Dan has taught only mainstream composition. He did have experience in teaching multilingual students, but it was minimal. He has never received L2 writing training.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The rest of the book takes a more descriptive or narrative approach to providing readers with detailed portraits of the focal multilingual writers' first-year composition placement experiences over the course of one academic year, particularly focusing on their placement decisions. Like Ilona Leki (2007), I intend to "leave maximum room for these students'

voices and [placement] experiences” (13) and keep “to a minimum outside scholarly references” (13). Because I want to let my multilingual writers voice out their placement stories, the remaining chapters primarily rely on direct quotes from a series of four in-depth interviews. I understand that “this choice makes it more difficult for readers to come away from the narratives with ‘the point,’” but “it helps the narratives remain somewhat truer to the students’ experiences” (Leki 2007, 13). However, from time to time, I will shift from descriptive data to my analytical discussion. It is also my intention not to edit the interview excerpts.

Chapter 2 is the heart of the book, providing a fundamental understanding of how multilingual students make their placement decisions. The chapter examines various sources of placement information—academic advisors’ recommendations, other students’ past placement experiences, new student orientation, and other sources providing placement-related information—exploited by the focal multilingual students when they chose to enroll in a mainstream or multilingual composition course. These sources of placement information, as I argue throughout the book, are conditions that make student agency in placement decisions possible. In other words, when these conditions are optimal, multilingual students will be able to exercise their agency, having the capacity to *negotiate* placement, *accept* or *deny* placement, *self-asses* their proficiency as they choose a writing course, *plan for* and *question* placement.

I call these capacities *acts of agency*, and I highlight them in the following three theme-based chapters (3–5), which are organized around the seven case studies. Each chapter will begin with a detailed description of the focal multilingual students’ profiles, followed by a discussion of their first-year placement experiences, scrutinizing what went into their placement decision process and the act(s) of agency they performed. These theme-based chapters also examine what happened after the placement decisions were made; and the goal is to illustrate the entire decision-making process rather than the outcome of the placement decisions. The cases of Afia and Joel in chapter

3 delineate the acts of negotiating and accepting placement. Chapter 4 explicates the act of self-assessing, demonstrating why and how self-evaluation was crucial for Jonas and Pascal when they were choosing their first-year writing courses. Chapter 5 showcases the acts of planning and questioning in which Jasim, Chan, and Ting found helpful while they were in the process of making placement decisions, particularly in their second semester. This chapter also explores emerging conditions for agency and succeeding acts of agency, delineating what caused such conditions and acts of agency.

Chapters 6 and 7 look into two other important placement stakeholders: academic advisors and writing teachers. Drawing on the discussion in chapter 2, especially how recommendations from academic advisors were the primary source of the focal students' placement decisions, chapter 6 examines the roles of academic advising in multilingual students' first-year composition placement decisions. Readers will also find voices of the focal multilingual students, who share their views and comments on English placement advising. This chapter's arrangement is appropriate because it is impossible to discuss a complete picture of English course placement advising without including students' perspectives or vice versa. Chapter 7's premise is that writing teachers work closely with students, yet we lack an understanding of how much writing teachers know about placement practices of multilingual students. This chapter asks what roles writing teachers should play in the placement of multilingual students in college composition programs and considers ways in which writing programs can involve writing teachers in the placement procedures for multilingual students.

Drawing on the discussions in previous chapters, chapter 8 explores how student agency can inform the overall programmatic placement of multilingual students, highlighting programmatic concerns and research implications for WPAs as they continue to improve the placement practices for multilingual writers. I also articulate my theory of agency and scrutinize how it can be applied in other situations. The book ends with a

coda in which I report on changes that have been made in the studied writing program after my research was completed. I also share some placement-related documents, including a placement brochure and placement handout, I developed as a result of this research. The studied writing program has used these documents since June 2012.

NOTES

1. This research was conducted at Arizona State University. While the name of the institution is revealed, the students, writing teachers, and academic advisors mentioned in the book are identified by pseudonyms.
2. I used the term “multilingual writers” in this book to refer to “a wide range of students who are actively developing proficiency in the English language” (Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi 2013, 73). I chose to use this term because “it seemed to be the most widely accepted euphemism for L2 writers” (Matsuda, Saenkhum, and Accardi 2013, 73) in the context of US college composition programs during the time of conducting this research and writing this book. Other terms like ESL, L2, and Generation 1.5 will also be seen in the book when referring to previous studies in which these terms were originally used.
3. Identifying resident multilingual students has been difficult (Harklau 2000, 36). When these students enter US colleges and universities, institutions do not collect information about their language backgrounds due to their status of US citizens or residents.
4. In addition to first-year composition courses, the writing program offers other higher-level English courses for undergraduate students.
5. Stretch Composition (WAC 101 and WAC 107) is designed to help develop students’ academic writing skills. Students have more time to work on their writing until they are ready to take the regular first-year writing sequence (ENG 101 and ENG 102 or ENG 107 and ENG 108). For detailed descriptions of Stretch Composition, see Glau 2007.
6. Information in table 1.2 had been used for placement before and during the time of this research was conducted between Fall 2010 and Spring 2011. For more updated information, visit <https://english.clas.asu.edu/admission/first-year-composition-courses/placement-information>.
7. DARS (Degree Audit Reporting System) is available through MyASU, the university’s online system in which students have access to their classes, specific courses they are enrolled, and other resources.
8. Since Jonas did not show up after his first two interviews completed, I did not have information about his age and other related information because I collected information about the student participants’ backgrounds in the final interview.