

# Rethinking Expertise: Course-Embedded WAC Tutors & Threshold Concepts

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**Second International Conference on English Across the Curriculum**

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018

- How many of you are involved with a writing center?
- How many of you have a WAC program (however you define it)?
- How about an English Across the Curriculum program?
- Who has undergraduate course-embedded writing Fellows?
- Is anyone trying to start any of these programs?

**First a question:  
why are you at this session?**

## **WE ARE MAKING TWO ARGUMENTS:**

1. Well-trained undergraduate course-embedded writing fellows are the glue that holds all of these programs together;
2. Course-embedded writing fellows working with English language learners should be non-native speakers, able to support meaning-making through translanguaging

# OUTLINE

- ❑ What are course-embedded writing fellows?
- ❑ What role do they play in courses?
- ❑ Where should they be trained and located?
- ❑ What role does threshold concept knowledge play in their work?
- ❑ How should we prepare course-embedded writing fellows to work in ELL classrooms?

- Undergraduate students
- Familiar with course, course materials, & expectations
- Attend all or some classes
- May facilitate writing workshops and peer-review in class
- Meet with students outside of class one-on-one or in groups

**What are  
course-  
embedded  
college  
writing  
fellows?**

- **Bridge between faculty & students,**  
*model student behavior and faculty-student relationships not another teacher*
- **Assist faculty in the classroom,**  
*writing workshops, in-class support*
- **Meet with faculty to discuss class & review assignments**  
*reinforces program language & writing strategies (stealth faculty development)*
- **Meet with students outside of class,**  
*increase help-seeking, provide clarification of course content & assignments, facilitate meaning-making – and tutor writing*

**What role  
do course-  
embedded  
writing  
fellows play  
in courses?**

- “Basic/developmental” writing courses
- First-year writing courses
- Writing intensive courses
- Writing in the disciplines courses

**Where do we typically find course-embedded writing fellows in the US?**

- “Basic/developmental” writing courses
- First-year writing courses
- Writing intensive courses
- Writing in the disciplines courses
- Courses for English language learners?

**Where do we typically find course-embedded writing fellows in the US?**



# Where should course-embedded writing fellows be located & trained?

The Writing Center

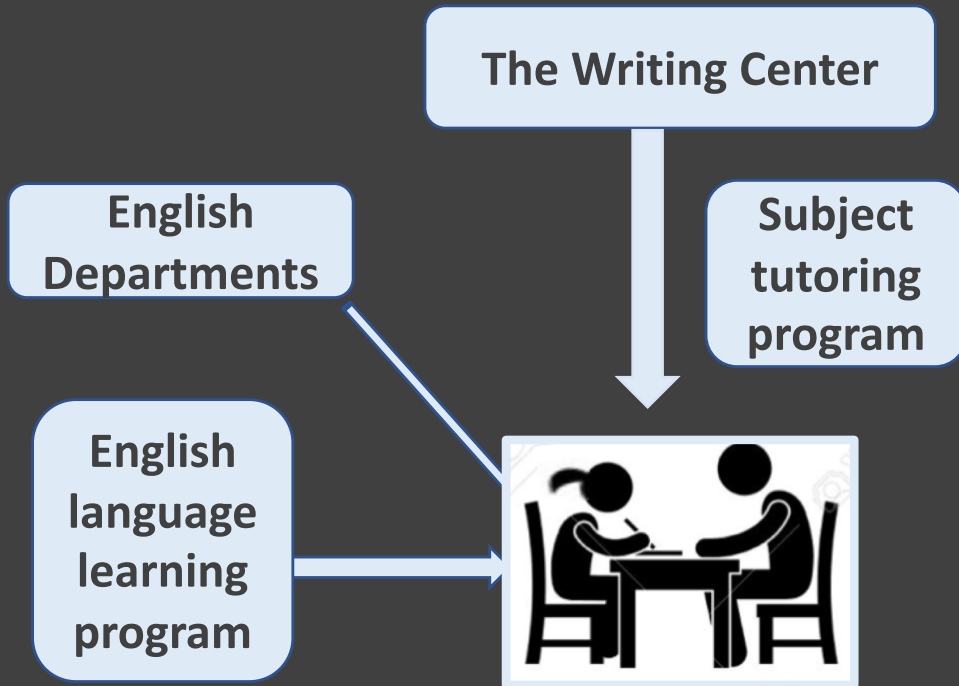
English  
Departments



Trained to be  
embedded in first-  
year writing courses  
but mostly as tutors  
outside of class

## An origin story

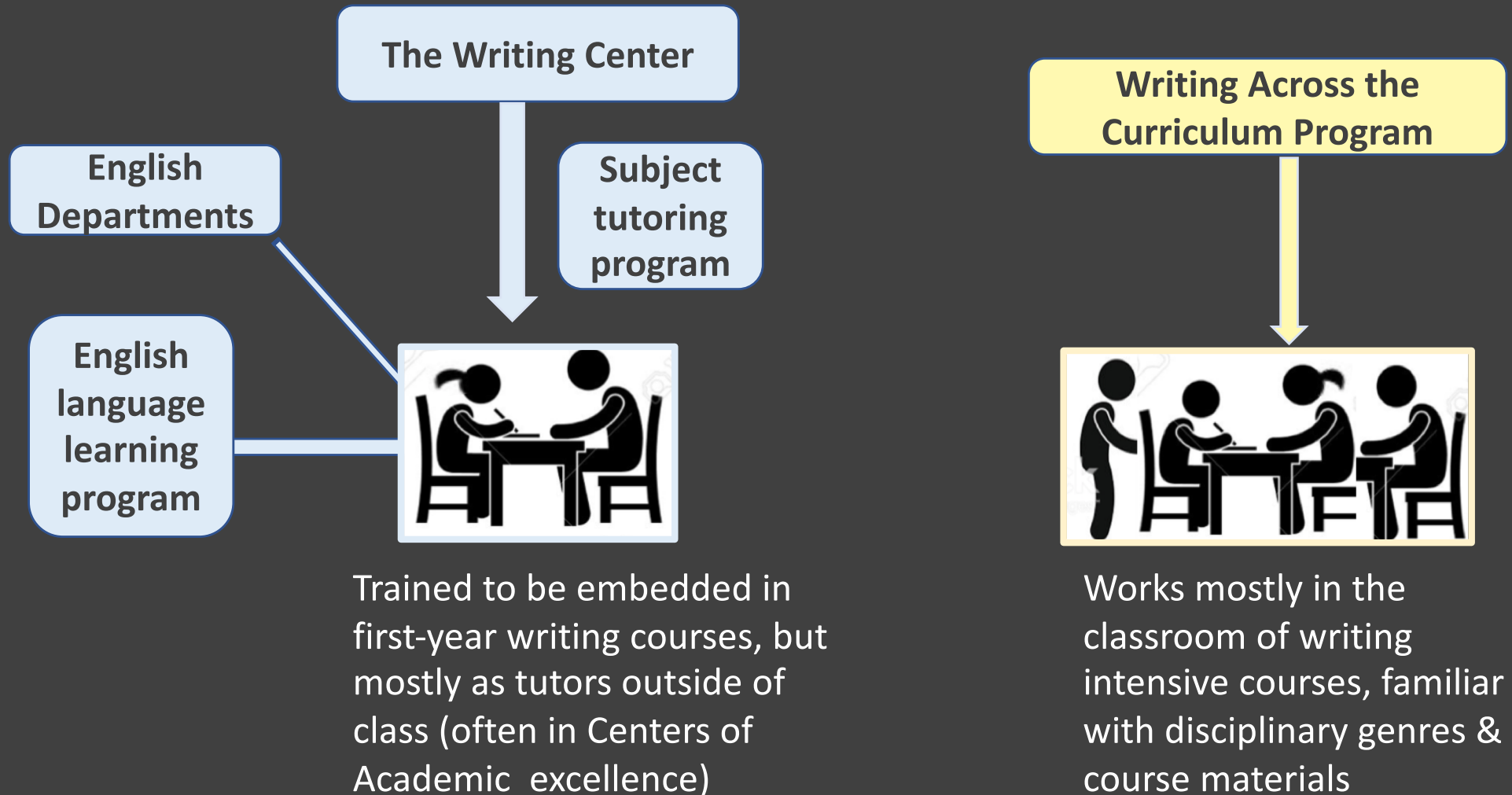
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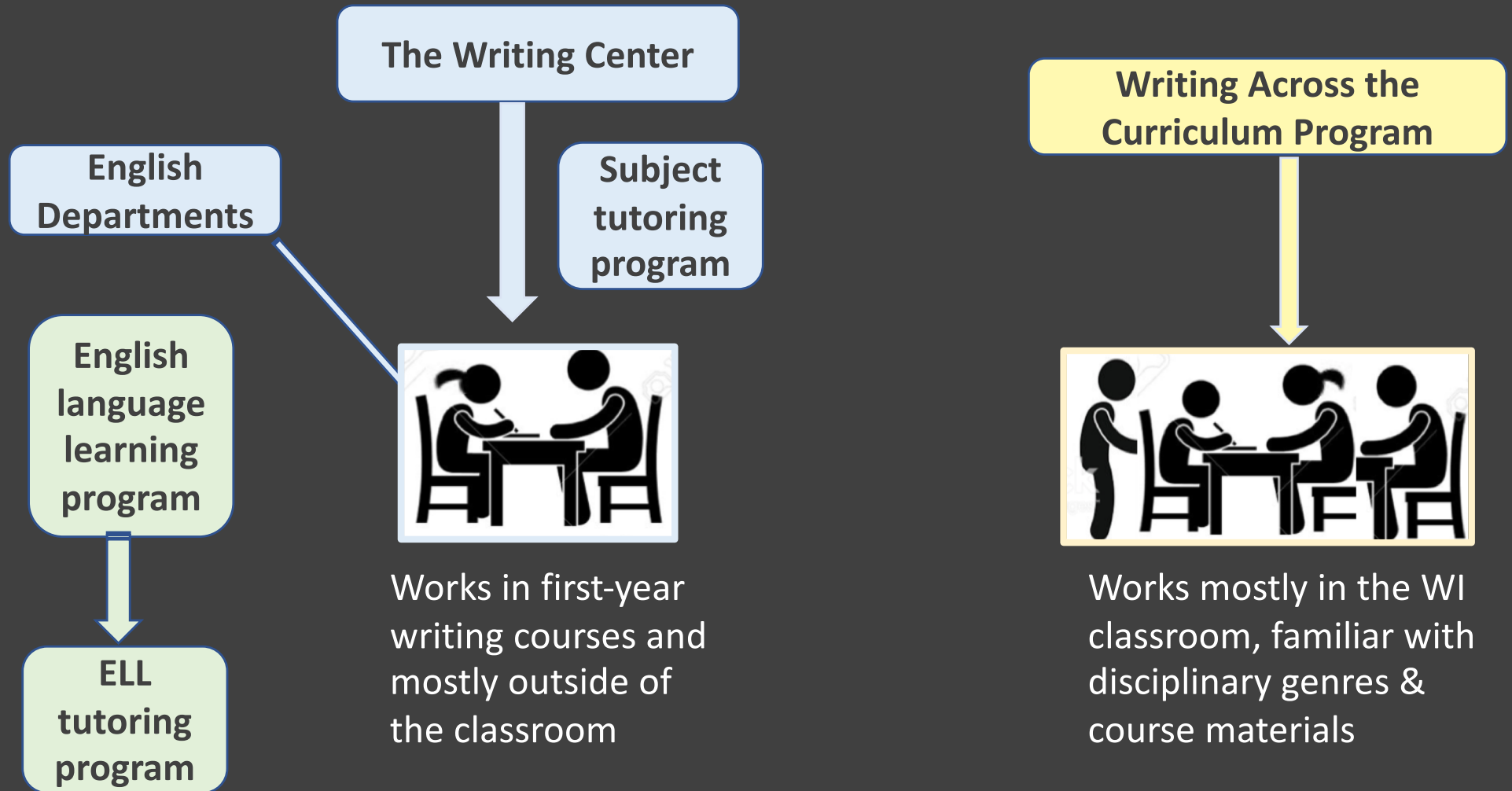
Trained to be embedded in first-year writing courses, but mostly as tutors outside of class (often in Centers of Academic excellence)

An evolving  
story; a  
cautionary  
tale

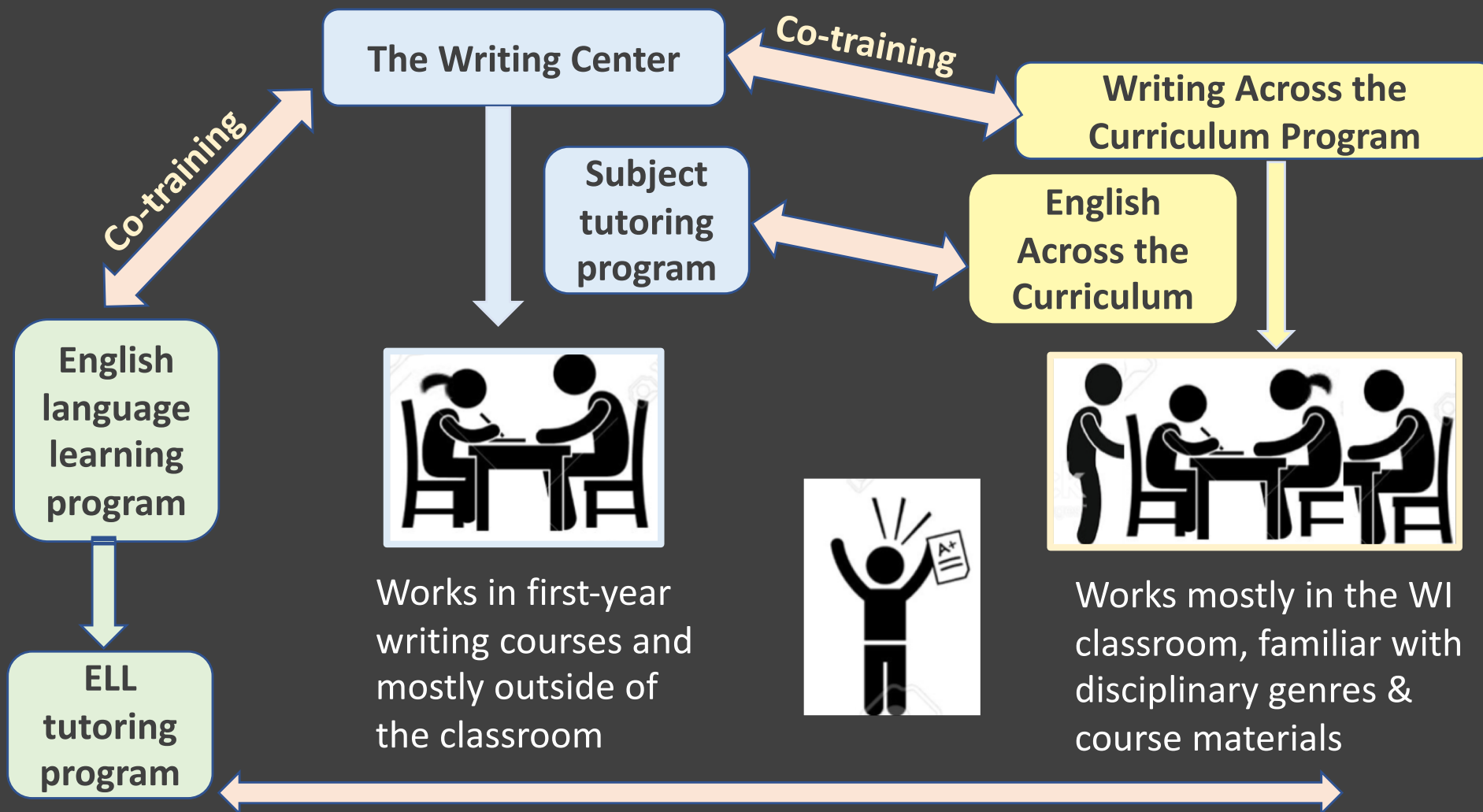
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- **Horizontal first-year program,**  
*coherency across sections; including the focus of peer response on global issues*
- **Mixed ability & advanced ELL,**  
*serve as a bridge between ELL students and monolingual or native-speaking faculty; facilitate translanguaging*
- **WAC, WID, or EAC program,**  
*discourse, genre, & threshold concept knowledge; skills transfer across courses*

**What role  
do course-  
embedded  
writing  
fellows play  
in different  
programs?**

## Concepts essential for deeper understanding of a discipline

Transformative      Explanatory  
Integrative  
*Irreversible*  
Provisional (& bounded)  
*Troublesome*

Meyer & Land (2003)

**What role  
does  
threshold  
concept  
knowledge  
play in this?**

Glynis Cousins “An Introduction to threshold concepts” (*Planet* No. 17 December 2006)

Guiding students toward and through knowledge thresholds may be the single most important thing course-embedded writing fellows can do

A writing threshold concepts is that the writing process is recursive and includes very rough first drafts that can be transformed by revision focusing on global issues not error.



## Course-embedded writing fellows in ELL classrooms: who, what, and how?

### Caitlin Shannon

Senior at Drew University  
majoring in music and Spanish  
minoring in English.

- CRLA level-three certified tutor, specialization in ELL;
- Tutored writing in both English and Spanish for 3 years;
- Course-embedded writing fellow, first-year writing & Spanish;
- Trains writing specialists & fellows working with ELL student;.
- Her scholarship focuses on street art as political activism and expression of cultural identity in Barcelona, Spain & Puerto Rico.
- She has presented her work at conferences in the US and Cuba



## Writing Fellows in ELL classes should be ELL students

- **Bridge between faculty & students,**  
*the native speaking Writing Fellow is just another professor in front of whom ELL students fear making mistakes*
- **Encourage translanguaging when necessary for student learning,**  
*normalizing the flow between languages and ideas as students learn, even if the class itself is monolingual*
- **Assist faculty by providing insight into where students are struggling**

**Why should  
we employ  
NNS as  
course-  
embedded  
writing  
fellows in  
ELL classes?**

- **They are not additional teachers, emphasize the writing process,** *asking only for a very rough draft reduces the pressure to be perfect*
- **Familiar with course content, genres of writing, and threshold concepts,** *they can explain concepts and writing rules from the perspective of someone who knows what it is like not to understand*
- **Focus on revision skills as a way to grasp course material & concepts,** *revision should emphasize ideas and concepts, not writing skills/correctness*

**What do  
course-  
embedded  
writing  
fellows bring  
to ELL  
classrooms?**

- **Emphasize that they aren't teachers,**  
*they don't need to know everything*
- **Review course threshold concepts**  
*Fellows can help students most by helping them grasp disciplinary threshold concepts*
- **Focus on ideas, thinking, & talking**  
*they facilitate students working together to solve problems, review ideas, articulate questions and concepts, talk, & read aloud*
- **Review common grammar errors**  
*to increase their confidence, but remind them that they should emphasize is meaning-making not error correction!*

**How should  
we prepare  
course-  
embedded  
writing  
fellows to  
work in all  
classrooms?**

- **Ongoing training and opportunity to learn as needed**  
*regular staff/training meetings with the program coordinator*
- **Support network of other Fellows,**  
*ideally some with more experience*
- **Comfortable with the professor**  
*professor & fellow should feel comfortable discussing concerns and challenges*
- **Professor needs to present the Fellow as credible and a valuable source of help**  
*in and outside of class – this is essential*

**What support is needed by course-embedded writing fellows in WAC & ELL courses?**

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**Thank you for coming!**