Open Access Publishing for English Language Learners

David Patent
Syracuse University

Sarah Tomlinson
Syracuse University

Dylan Mohr
Syracuse University

David T. Lind
Syracuse University

Reports and Reviews

Open Access Publishing for English Language Learners by David Patent, Sarah Tomlinson, Dylan Mohr, and David T. Lind

Abstract

Open access publishing for English language learners reinforces the notion that valuable perspectives can be shared with the academic community before attaining an idealized threshold of English language proficiency. This report offers a description of three case studies that illustrate how open access repositories can be used to provide publishing opportunities for English language learners and stimulate interest in academic writing. Historical background on open scholarship publishing is included, along with implications for policy. The report expands on a panel discussion presented by the authors at the 2023 EnglishUSA Professional Development Conference.

Introduction

Developing a sense of audience can enhance the quality of writing for English language learners (ELLs). Studies on authentic writing outside the classroom have focused largely on blogging and social media activities, and on the benefits of receiving feedback from one's peers (Arslan & Şahin-Kızıl, 2010; Chen & Brown, 2012). However, there is a gap in the literature on the potential positive effects for ELLs of publishing work in more formal academic contexts. This may be due to the fact that ELLs are rarely encouraged to think of their work as worthy of publication for a broader academic audience. While they may be taught the conventions of academic writing, the unstated assumption is that ELLs do not possess the requisite language skills to merit having their work appear in an academic journal or other scholarly outlet.

The case studies described in this report challenge this assumption. The motivation for the paper was provided by three projects in open access publishing that involve English language learners at Syracuse University (SU). The projects were made possible through a collaboration between the College of Professional Studies, which houses the university's English Language Institute, and Syracuse University Libraries, which host the university's open access (OA) institutional repository, SURFACE. The paper elaborates on a panel discussion presented by the authors at the EnglishUSA 2023 Professional Development Conference.

This report also provides some background into OA repositories, which are a resource that gives faculty and student scholars the opportunity to publish their work for a global audience, without having to pay an article processing charge (APC). As the case studies in this paper illustrate, this opportunity can also be made available to ELLs enrolled in pre-academic and pathway programs. Implications for practice are provided in the conclusion.

Open Scholarship Publishing

OA began as a publishing term. It was a broad, internet-based movement that began in the early 2000s and sought to grant free and open online access to academic research and information. With the advent of the Internet, the open access movement proposed that a work of scholarship could be uploaded online and made free to read and download, thus cutting out traditional, profit-based publishers

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and democratizing research. OA publishing has since radically upended traditional publishing models and opened up research that had been cloistered away in university and college libraries or kept behind paywalls. In the decades since, institutions of higher education have invested in institutional repositories (IRs) that have come to serve as the digital archive for research produced at that institution. IRs house almost exclusively OA material produced at their respective institutions. While OA began with its gaze firmly set on faculty and researcher scholarship, one unexpected benefit of the movement and the subsequent IR networks that have emerged to support it, has been its value to students and the ways it can support pedagogical initiatives in the classroom.

SU's IR, SURFACE, hosts over 17,000 pieces of scholarship and creative activity produced at Syracuse, and that material averages about one million downloads per year. Depositors run the gambit from advanced research faculty to undergraduate capstones, and staff members to post-doctoral researchers. Everyone that deposits in SURFACE is sent a quarterly "readership snapshot" that provides them with usage metrics, including downloads, tweets, other social media uptake, and even detailed lists of where their work is being downloaded, often down to an institutional level (e.g., U.S. Department of Energy). Students often express amazement when they see that their work is downloaded hundreds, if not thousands of times per year. From the perspective of SU librarians, a library that stresses practiced information literacy in all its classrooms, enables students to see how their voices and arguments are circulating widely, and shows students how they are adding to the scholarly conversation, even at the beginning stages of their careers, has provided an incredibly useful service.

SURFACE has partnered with the English Language Institute for several years to provide a platform for student research. Since 2019, 222 student works produced by students while at the English Language Institute have been deposited in SURFACE, and that work has been downloaded almost 30,000 times. However, as the following case studies will show, these astounding numbers tell only half the story. What has been so exciting about this partnership from the perspective of those involved in open scholarship are the myriad innovative pedagogical uses for OA that places like the English Language Institute have discovered and implemented.

While most universities and colleges have IRs, there are several other open access repositories for unaffiliated individuals and entities interested in publishing student work. A detailed list of other repositories, such as Humanities Commons, can be found on the Open Access Directory ("Disciplinary Repositories," 2020).

Case Study 1: Fulbright English for Graduate Studies
The Fulbright Pre-Academic Program aims to provide international graduate students who have been accepted to master's and doctorate programs, as well as granted research opportunities, around the U.S. to enhance their academic English skills and learn about aspects of culture that they will encounter while studying in the U.S. This program runs for four weeks during the summer with around 35 participants in each cohort. Students take English language classes in the mornings and attend cultural presentations in the afternoons. They also have the opportunity to go on field trips around the Central New York area.

Students in the Fulbright program are pursuing studies in various fields and disciplines. To complete the program, students are asked to create a research poster that is related to their discipline or field. Students are not required to complete original

research for this poster; rather, they are asked to build upon a topic that they have researched before and are familiar with. Developing the research poster presentation occurs throughout the program. Their English instructors help them organize the components of their poster (abstract, literature review, findings, etc.) and review sections as the students complete them. Additionally, each class has a graduate facilitator who helps them with the process and sets aside time for students to do mock presentations of their posters before the culminating event, the poster session.

The participants in the program have the opportunity to add their finalized poster to SURFACE. The English Language Institute works closely with the Syracuse University Library team to upload the posters. Students who choose to have their posters added to SURFACE complete a permission form that is collected and sent, along with PDFs of their final posters, to the SURFACE team. The team then adds students' posters to the English Language Institute's page on SURFACE.

The publication of their work provides the participants in the program with an artifact that they can share with their friends and family back home, as well as with future faculty, researchers, and others within their field of study. Students have expressed how valuable it is to already have published work before they begin their degree or research program in the U.S. They are proud of their effort and their ability to develop work that is satisfactory for higher education academics in the U.S., building their confidence and resilience.

Case Study 2: English for Architects

The English for Architects (EfA) program is designed for international students who have been admitted to SU's School of Architecture as graduate students on the condition that they complete six weeks of intensive English language instruction in the summer prior to matriculation. Since 2017, the program has undergone several iterations, including a switch from in-person to online instruction in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a consistent and central component of the program has remained unchanged: the final project.

The final project has three outcomes: a paper, a presentation (in-person or mediated), and a poster. As in the case of the Fulbright program, the final product is a poster published on SURFACE. The poster element is designed to help students meet three key learning objectives.

- Present findings from secondary research clearly and concisely, with minimal errors in language use.
- Synthesize information from multiple sources on a specific topic.
- Integrate citations effectively into written output, demonstrating an emerging ability to apply the conventions of the Chicago Manual of Style.

Over the past three years, all students in the EfA program have elected to have their posters published on SURFACE and have to varying degrees achieved the learning objectives. Students in the EfA program seem to have a high level of investment in completing the poster successfully, where investment refers to the extent to which a learner feels that their perseverance in completing a task empowers them (Norton, 2013).

This high level of investment in the poster project may be associated with several factors. First, learning is differentiated by giving students choices. They choose topics they are

interested in rather than having topics chosen for them. The instructor then guides them through the process of developing their ideas, suggesting various paths towards project completion rather than prescribing a single approach. Students also develop topic authority and undergo extensive meaningful practice with language related to their field. The most powerful factor may be the chance to do more than go through the motions of producing an academic text, one that is likely to have a readership of one (the instructor). The publication offers them a low-stakes opportunity to put their work out there and to be heard by a wider audience. It is also a contribution to their field, however slight. While formal research would provide greater insight into the efficacy of publishing posters on SURFACE in EfA, anecdotally speaking, students are invested in the project and feel that it is valuable to their learning.

Case Study 3: English for Academic Purposes

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course is part of the International Year-One Program at SU. The program is designed to provide a pathway to international students seeking entry into the university at the undergraduate level. Students complete the first year in their home countries taking hybrid (face-to-face and online) credit-bearing and non-credit EAP courses, with an online SU instructor and an in-person instructor provided for all courses. Upon successful completion of the program, they matriculate fully into the university as second year transfer students.

The second semester of the Online EAP course, in session at the time of writing, has three main aims:
- To develop learners' active and receptive language skills through a variety of media;
- To provide learners with opportunities to activate and enhance knowledge of English through theme-based instruction;

- To guide learners towards an understanding of the academic and social culture of higher education institutions in the U.S.

The theme of the course in the Spring 2023 online course is sustainable development, and all content is related to this theme. Over the span of fifteen weeks, students gain skills in academic reading strategies, summarizing and responding to academic content, and developing and organizing a term paper with citations and references in APA Style. The ultimate goal of the project is for the students to have written a term paper that is suitable for publication in an online undergraduate journal issue hosted on SURFACE. Each student will choose one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals published by the United Nations General Assembly (2015) and write a term paper about a question that emerges from the goal and its specific targets (sub-goals).

The hope is that the prospect of publishing a paper accessible to a wide audience will motivate, or at least compel students to cultivate in-depth knowledge of a topic through reading and writing in English, in addition to developing experience in the application of a range of academic skills, including:
- Forming a research question;
- Paraphrasing and summarizing information from sources;
- Organizing ideas coherently;
- Citing and referencing sources used;
- Writing clearly and concisely for an academic audience.

Conclusions and Implications
As illustrated in the above case studies, creative use of OA repositories can broaden the scope of academic material deemed worthy of publication to include meaningful content authored by ELLs. This has potential implications for English language instruction

in academic settings, as it removes a traditional barrier that separates fully matriculated international students from students enrolled in pre-academic and pathway programs. It also provides a new source of content for open scholarship librarians and justifies collaboration between English language programs and university libraries.

Additionally, writing for an academic audience gives ELLs an incentive to think critically and in nuanced ways about problems in their discipline and pressing social issues of our time. It gives them an opportunity to structure their writing carefully and create a favorable impression on the reader. In essence, ELLs who publish in OA repositories get real-world practice in developing the craft of academic writing. Students that develop this skill are more likely to be successful in their academic endeavors in the long term.

Lastly, and in conclusion, publishing on an academic forum alongside a cohort of their peers can give ELLs a collective sense of accomplishment. It provides them with tangible artifacts that represent their ability to engage with the broader academic community. This can impact positively their overall experience as international students and their sense of well-being and belonging.

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David Patent is an Instructor and Design Lead for International Programs, College of Professional Studies, Syracuse University

Sarah Tomlinson is a Program Advisor for Syracuse University Abroad

Dylan Mohr is the Open Scholarship Librarian for Syracuse University Libraries

David T. Lind is the Director of International Programs, College of Professional Studies, Syracuse University