

Working with ESL Writers Across the Curriculum

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Epilogue

...the dominant communication style and world view of the U.S. university, variously known as "academic argument," "analytical writing," "critical thinking," or just plain "good writing," is based on assumptions and habits of mind that are derived from western-or more specifically U.S.-culture, and that this way of thinking and communicating is considered sophisticated, intelligent, and efficient by only a tiny fraction of the world's peoples. If faculty want to encourage deeper, more meaningful multiculturalism, we need to recognize that many of our students have been brought up to think and express themselves very differently, and that these ways are worthy of our attention and understanding.

Helen Fox, *Listening to the World*

INTRODUCTION

As the number of international students increases in American university classrooms, more content-area professors who require writing in their courses are seeking information on how to better respond to ESL writing. This author has studied the current research on working with ESL writers in order to better prepare content-area professors to work more effectively with non-native English speakers. While most pertinent research in this area is written for ESL and writing faculty whose central focus is teaching language and writing, much of this research can be applied to classroom practice across the disciplines. This author has selected the research pertinent to content-area faculty whose main focus is delivering specialized content while also requiring writing as part of their courses.

This Faculty Guide for Working with ESL Writers is divided into two sections, one theoretical and one practical:

Myths and Misperceptions: Working with ESL/Multicultural Writers

1. Myth of Transience

Research shows that many administrator and faculty decisions regarding ESL students are underlined by the belief that if only the right courses were offered, in the right sequence, then ESL writers' problems would be overcome before they would move into content-area courses. Many refer to this as the "myth of transience," the belief that problems with learning English as a second language, and problems with writing in a non-native language, are transient or temporary. According to Matsuda, many teachers and administrators believe that the responsibility for teaching language and writing lies solely with those who teach ESL courses. He argues that this division of labor is based on the "myth of transience" which is based on "the assumption that ESL can be broken down neatly into a linguistic component and a writing component and that the linguistic problems will disappear after some additional instruction in remedial language courses" (714-5).

Thus when planning ESL programs and writing courses, many teachers and administrators envision a sequence of courses that ESL students might take which will ensure these students

will emerge from such courses writing error-free prose. Yet research shows that even after students have completed special courses before taking required writing courses, and then have moved into courses in their disciplines, some problems with the English language remain. Matsuda reminds us that even years of study in English will not ensure that students will avoid error: "Even when ESL students are enrolled in special courses before taking required writing courses, the unique difficulties that ESL writers encounter in English composition are not likely to disappear completely after a semester-or even a few years-of additional language instruction" (715). Leki also points out that "after ten years of studying English in classrooms abroad, ESL students still may have trouble writing effectively in English...and students who recite grammar rules...are not always able to use those rules in producing language" (23).

Zamel observes that it is a commonly held belief that "language must be in place and fixed in order to do work in the course" (509). It is this belief that often results in a demand for stronger ESL programs to "fix" the students' grammar problems, or in complaints against writing courses that pass students who still make mistakes in their writing. Zamel describes an assumption that underlies a teacher's comments on a student's paper, an assumption commonly held by many teachers: "If students had been prepared appropriately, if the gatekeeping had kept students out of her course until they were more like their native counterparts... students would be able to do the required work" (509-10).

After studying professor's comments on ESL students' writing, Zamel concludes, "What we see here is an illustration of the 'myth of transience,' a belief that permeates institutions of higher education and perpetuates the notion that these students' problems are temporary and can be remediated—so long as some isolated set of courses or program of instruction, but not real courses in the academy, takes on the responsibility of doing so" (510). Zamel emphasizes that this belief ensures that faculty across the curriculum will rely on ESL language and writing courses to take care of the language and writing problems so that content-area professors can focus on delivering course content. She concludes, "Such a belief supports the illusion that permanent solutions are possible, which releases faculty from the ongoing struggle and questioning that the teaching-learning process inevitably involves" (510).

There are several reasons why ESL students who move into content-area courses after having successfully completed ESL and writing courses will still make many errors in their writing. This can be a result of the ever-increasing complexity of material that might demand the attention of students who may fall into old patterns of error as they take on the challenges of the discipline-specific language, concepts, and conventions. After studying faculty responses to ESL writers, Zamel concludes about some content-area faculty: "There is little sense of how the unfamiliar terms, concepts, and ways of seeing that are particular to [a] course can be acquired. Nor is there any appreciation for how this very unfamiliarity with the course content may be constraining students' linguistic processes" (509-10).

2. Myth of Effectiveness of Grammar Instruction

Feeding the "myth of transience" is the "myth of grammar instruction." Zamel reminds us that although many institutions create courses that focus on language and essay conventions, with a focus on decontextualized rules, such courses are ineffective:

"Those of us who have tried to accommodate institutional demands have... found this to be a troubling and tension-filled undertaking, since even when we focus on standards of language use or conventions of academic discourse, students, especially those who are still acquiring English, are not necessarily more successful in meeting the expectations of other faculty" (516). Research shows that there is little or no transfer from grammar and rule-focused instruction to writing: "There seems to be little carry-over from such instructional efforts to subsequent work since it is the very nature of such narrowly conceptualized instruction that undercuts genuine learning" (Zamel 516).

Leki reminds us of Krashen's research on language acquisition which reveals that much of the English language is either not governed by rules because it is idiomatic, and also that linguists are able to describe only a limited number of such rules: "[Krashen] makes the point that linguists claim to know and be able to describe only a small portion of the rules of any natural language. Language teachers know only a small portion of what the linguists know. In their classes, language teachers teach only a small portion of what they know. Of that small portion taught, students learn an even smaller portion. In other words, it is impossible to "learn" a language" (Leki 15).

So much of the English language is idiomatic, ungoverned by rules. While learning the rules that govern the English language is essential, those rules will not take a student very far in learning English. According to Leki, Krashen's research also shows "that the rules that a learner does learn contribute very little to the learner's language ability...In other words, rules learned through error correction and direct instruction in grammar may have a positive, albeit small, effect on language production" (16).

3. Myth of Effectiveness of Error Correction

Many responders to writing, both of native and non-native speakers, feel compelled to mark all errors in students' writing. Yet research shows that there is little or nothing gained from this practice, particularly with ESL students: "While error correction may have some use in helping a person learn, it seems to have little effect on the acquisition process" (Leki 15).

In other words, while responders to student writing may feel that by marking all errors, they are helping students improve their command of the language or writing, this practice does not improve students' language ability or writing ability, and may in fact, impede improvement by overwhelming and confusing students.

4. Myth of Inadequacy or Deficiency

Some readers of ESL writing conclude that the level of error points to either unintelligence, illiteracy, or laziness. According to Leki, "Presumably, these faculty see the irritating errors as editing errors, those that could be avoided with careful rereading. The fact that errors are there implies that the writers have been careless or lazy among native speakers may be considered what used to be called "illiteracies," suggesting that students who make them are illiterate" (32).

Too often, as Victor Villanueva reminds us, "bad language" is too often mistaken for "insufficient cognitive development" (11). Zamel refers to this as "...deficit thinking, a focus on difference, [which] blinds us to the logic, intelligence and richness of students' processes and knowledge" (518). In *Listening to the World*, Helen Fox provides moving narratives of non-native English speakers, some accomplished professionals and writers in their native languages, who are frustrated by some American university faculty who assume that these students are deficient in more than language ability: "At least one faculty member I interviewed had come to the conclusion that they weren't able to 'think' at all" (Fox xv).

Fox has us listen to a Nepalese student's frustration with faculty who confuse a writer's inability to meet the required conventions in a discipline-specific discourse with a student's abilities to write in general at all:

You know, the comment I get so often from professors is that I need to be improved. And I don't really agree with that. I say, what improvement, in what context? What does improvement imply? I don't need to improve myself in order to write because I have been writing for a long time. I'm a professional. I can write nicely. Come to Nepal, you will see my articles in the newspaper, you will see my book. What do you mean by improvement? (qtd. in Fox 65)

In *Decoding ESL*, Amy Tucker's (1995) interview with Chinese student Mimi Soo reveals students' awareness that their professors assume deficiency when they read non-native speakers' writing:

I have to say things in a different way in English, to convince my teacher that I'm smart in spite of all my grammar errors," she explained. "My thoughts are much more complex in Chinese; in English, I just don't have enough words. And I don't like to put things so elementarily. (Tucker 143)

Zamel emphasizes the importance of encouraging faculty to put aside their assumptions of deficiency: "faculty [need to] understand how to look below the surface of student texts for evidence of proficiency, promoting a kind of reading that benefits not just ESL students but all students" (518).

5. Myth of "Just a Technique"

Research into the experiences of non-native English speakers makes it abundantly clear that American university faculty are mistaken in assuming that, for ESL and multicultural students, learning the conventions of American university academic discourse is merely about learning different forms of presentation. It is important that faculty understand that students who are learning to write this unfamiliar academic discourse often suffer a crisis of identity, both personal and cultural.

Helen Fox's study of international students' experiences in learning to write academic prose in American colleges dramatizes vividly these students' personal and cultural dilemmas as they try to write for their American professors. In an interview with a student from Chile, Fox relates her

own realization that as a teacher she had underestimated the complexity of international students' experience in learning how to write in American colleges: "Carla told me how painful it had been to write in a way that felt unnatural to her and how much anxiety she had felt as she tried to force herself to adopt the style that I so cheerfully and naively was calling 'just another technique'" (72).

Fox describes her growing understanding of the dramatic metamorphosis that these students must experience in order to succeed as writers: "A graduate student from Chile made me realize the implications of the paradigm shift we are asking them to make when she examined her own resistance to learning 'a new way to write.' 'You said it was just a technique, but what I discovered was that it meant I had to look at things differently. Real differently. And in that sense, my world view has to change'" (Fox 44).

If we listen to some non-native speakers' accounts of their struggles which Fox provides, we hear the pain and confusion that students from other cultures experience when learning how to write American academic prose:

A Chilean student writes of her fear of acculturation:

I was afraid that if I forced myself to write in this new style, I would become acculturated. . . . But at the same time, I know I need to change to survive here. Personally, I was rebelling to write. The ideas didn't come. (qtd. in Fox 72)

The same Chilean student explains the complex implications for identity in adopting a new rhetoric:

Learning to write in an American style, it is much more than learning a new technique. It is a way this culture 'normalizes' you to the system, shaping on you new values and new ways of looking at the world. Therefore, the writing style is not value free; it has ethical consequences, depending on if it is empowering or disempowering for you in this new culture or in your home culture. (qtd. in Fox 77)

A student from Sri Lanka writes about how he felt that others were deriding his culture:

I felt like a misfit...very unwanted, very put down...I thought everybody must be laughing at me. I wondered if people knew that I had a culture of my own, or that there are even any worthy people in my society. I even wondered what people here must think of Buddhists. Are we a passive group of people? Can't we do anything without being told? (qtd. in Fox 3)

A student from Japan writes about how he had to create a new self, and the fear he felt in having to do so:

I was very struck when I read an article by the Chinese student who had to construct a different self-identity in order to be able to write the way Americans do. That made me think a lot. Because I was resistant. I had been trying to make a single identity, somehow my Japanese and

my American self merging, so I wouldn't lose the Japanese part of me. That was my fear, that I would lose my old identity, which was important to me. Creating a new self-identity would mean that I would have to evaluate the one I originally had. And that was such an incredible fear! So as I read the article, I guess I finally accepted that I would have to construct, in a sense, a second personality. I told myself, "Well, I may have to." (qtd. in Fox 71-2).

A student from Nepal writes about his conflict of selves:

And so I began to lose confidence. I began to feel, "Gee, Surya, you're stupid." And you know, "You can't write." That voice was coming from here, from this culture. But at the same time another voice which was with me saying, "Surya, don't worry, you're all right, don't lose your confidence, you can do fine, just try to learn the ideas, you don't have to concentrate on the language or the writing style." And really, sometimes it got very tense between the two voices, and I would feel very depressed. And then I would just sit and watch TV and not do anything, not even read for my courses, and then I would begin to worry and think about home. (qtd. in Fox 70)

This same Nepalese student writes about the enormity and complexity of the change that is asked of him:

Because of my cultural background, I would never confront anyone about the comments they made about my writing. Besides, I had to succeed so I wouldn't lose face with my family back home. That's what all international students have to put up with, the terrible importance their families put to learn to use a very aggressive style that would more or less-you know-slap the reader in the face. My God, that was really hard. You cannot change your habits of a lifetime overnight. Imagine, a person who spends half his life, thirty, forty years, writing, working with people, and then come here for one or two years, do you expect him to be able to change his style? (qtd. in Fox70)

In *Academic Writing in a Second Language*, editors Belcher and Braine provide more compelling evidence of international students' crises of identity, relating a Chinese student's crisis of self:

By such a redefinition I mean not only the change in how I envisioned myself, but also the change in how I perceived the world. The old "I" used to embody only one set of values, but now it had to embody multiple sets of values. To be truly "myself," which I knew was key to my success in learning English composition, meant not to be my Chinese self at all. That is to say, when I write in English I have to wrestle with and abandon (at least temporarily) the whole system of ideology which previously defined me in myself... I had to put aside an ideology of collectivism and adopt the values of individualism. (qtd. in Belcher and Braine xx).

Danling Fu in *The Trouble Is My English* tells of her own experiences as a student from China trying to learn correct ways to read and write about literature on her journey toward a doctorate in English literature:

...no matter how hard I tried to learn the "proper" ways to read and write about literature, I continued to suffer feelings of loss and confusion. (5).

These testimonials to the crisis of identity in ESL and multi-cultural students caused by their efforts to adopt a new rhetoric point to the need for American university faculty to acknowledge that these students are not merely being asked to try on a different costume, but rather to question their cultural ways of seeing and knowing.

6. Myth of Monolithic Academic Discourse Community

To understand the challenges ESL students face in content-area courses, it is important for students and faculty to acknowledge that there is no university-wide definition of good writing. Leki describes a study in which students and faculty were asked to rank the same essays: Out of 29 ESL writing, non-ESL writing, and content-area faculty, the ranking of essays varied. More important, even faculty using the same criteria disagreed. She observes that "the faculty members were not very consistent among themselves, that criteria for rank ordering the essays varied fairly widely, and that even with the same stated criteria, faculty differed in their identification of those criteria in specific essays" (Leki "Good" 23).

As Leki points out, there are "many discourse communities subsumed under the term academic, each community with its own set of expectations for students, and certainly also professional, texts" (Leki "Good" 42). Anthropologist Geertz' work points to the variety of discourses in academic communities which he calls "intellectual villages" (161), and which Leki describes as "complete with local and sometimes parochial standards tenaciously adhered to" ("Good" 45).

If students assume the existence of a universal idea of good writing, and the existence of a monolithic academic discourse, and faculty, both in writing and content-area courses, do not help students to become aware of the variety of discourse in the academic community, then all students, especially ESL students, will remain confounded.

No one single writing course could possibly teach students about the multiple discourses in the academic community. It is important that content-area faculty teach their students not only what makes good writing in that discipline, but also why: "We have an obligation to our students to make our standards as explicit as possible, while realizing at the same time that even with explicit criteria for good writing, there is much that will remain implicit and, therefore, difficult for our students to comprehend and respond to" (Leki "Good" 40).

In other words, faculty must work to make the implicit explicit concerning the expectation of good writing in their disciplines, and the assumptions that inform those expectations.

7. Myth of Effectiveness of the Plagiarism Handout

All educational institutions publish a plagiarism policy for students, and there are hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of handbooks, handouts, and websites that provide students information on documenting sources. Yet the problem persists. Certainly there are those students who

intentionally plagiarize, but often students, especially students from other cultures, do not know they are plagiarizing, or cannot understand the concept of plagiarism.

Leki observes that students from other countries are raised in cultures with very different views of how knowledge is communicated. She explains, "In some places in the world, students are encouraged to learn/memorize the writings of the learned of antiquity and to use those, not their own thoughts, in their writing. For these students, originality in the sense that we use the term may seem immodest and presumptuous" (71). Student can also use others' words to honor them, "It is possible that these students copy the words and phrases of other writers because the limitations of their range in English cause them to feel that there is no other way to say the same thing. But it is equally true that sometimes students use other authors' texts because they admire the way they are written and feel that changing them would imply that they are trying to improve upon them" (Leki 71).

Students from communal cultures find puzzling the western concept of owning words: "these attitudes toward originality and toward writing as property do not prevail worldwide"(Leki 71). Students from cultures where oral language dominates, and where there are hardly any written texts in their languages, find the idea of documentation especially confounding.

In other words, how do we account for students who read the handbooks, handouts, and websites, but still produce writing full of documentation errors, or there is not any documentation? I have had many experiences explaining the idea of documentation to international students, and sometimes they have looked at me with either blank stares, or looks of disbelief, and then proceeded to do as they have always done-leave out citations. But I have been successful when I have provided a model and explained the reasoning behind the convention of documentation. Citation is a complex skill, and varies from discipline to discipline, and even within disciplines there are differences. Handbooks, handouts, and websites must be mediated to be effective.

8. Myth of a Universal Rhetoric

Not only does the definition of good writing vary among American university faculty, but also among cultures. Robert Kaplan first explored the patterns of rhetoric that vary among cultures. Although he at first implied that these patterns of rhetoric represent thought patterns and was criticized for this idea, it is clear that these patterns are not innate but culturally and socially determined.

Leki explains, "Since even different discourse communities within a single culture have different expectations of writing (for example, preferred length of sentences, choice of vocabulary, acceptability of using first person, extent of using voice, degree to which writers are permitted to interpret, amount of metaphorical language accepted), it makes sense that different cultures would have different expectations of writing, and that students, who have lived in their own cultures, gone to school, and read books, would have built up structural schemata reflecting those expectations, that is, would have internalized patterns of discourse prevalent in their cultures" (92).

This anecdote about President George Bush on a visit to Japan dramatizes the issue:

An example of the cultural and linguistic conflict can be seen in former President George Bush's visit to Japan several years ago when he appeared before Japanese legislators and told them to buy American cars. Japanese newspapers, television, and people on the street remarked at the rudeness of the American president who was telling them what to do. Yet, if the President told us Americans that we should "buy American" we would most likely not think him rude; we might not like what he says, and we might disagree, but we would not attribute his remarks to rudeness.

Bliss, who offers this anecdote, analyzes its significance:

After reports of the Japanese opinion reached American newspapers, commentators remarked that the Japanese did not understand Bush's intent, that he did not intend to be rude...The perception of rudeness, and the American response, can, I believe, be at least partly attributed to underlying linguistic differences in the cultures and to the logical structures of Japanese and English. Although it is easy to give an order in Japanese, if one wants to persuade someone to do something, the speaker rarely tells the person what to do. Instead, the typical persuasive structure might mention discreet points favoring the proposition, and, after listening to these points, the listener will agree or disagree with the proposition-even though it has never been stated directly. (qtd. in Bliss 17- 18)

Like the Japanese misinterpretation of Bush, American university faculty sometimes misinterpret their students' rhetoric as "bad writing" or "incorrect writing," rather than different writing: "The writing strategies ESL students use in response to culturally patterned rhetorical constraints may seem illogical, digressive, or circuitous to an English-speaking reader" (Leki 26).

In her interviews with international students, Fox listens again and again to students' frustrations with American academic rhetoric. Their dilemma is reflected in this exchange between a Japanese student and her professor:

I still remember the day I walked into his office and started explaining about my papers, my ideas, what I would like to do, and he just cut me off. "Stop beating around the bush! This is America! I have five minutes for you!" I was behaving out of politeness, not to get to the issue right away, giving him background first. (qtd. in Fox 19)

Another Japanese student points to her frustration with the writer-responsible prose style of the West versus a reader responsible prose style she was taught:

Another thing that made me crazy was that I had to write everything down so that readers could understand the point. In Japanese writing we do not write everything we want to say. Writers can give readers some ideas or hints but not clear answers. (qtd. in Fox 116).

And another Japanese student writes about the subtlety expected of Japanese writers:

Japanese is more vague than English... It's supposed to be that way. You don't say what you mean right away. You don't criticize directly. (qtd. in Fox 8)

A student from Singapore expresses his frustration with the conventions of academic argument in American rhetoric:

But that was intentional. I don't want to take a position!...In Singapore you would never state your opinion on such a topic; you might get arrested. (qtd. in Fox 24)

A student from Chile finds American academic conventions simplistic:

When I read something by an American it sounds so childish...It's because we don't see with these connections. It's just like: 'This is a watch, the watch is brown, da-da, da-da.' For us, that's funny. I think that for Americans, it must be funny, the way I describe things. (qtd. in Fox 21)

In many cultures, digression is considered valuable in essays, as in Latin American cultures. In other words, an off-the-point style can be culturally based:

It's impossible to say everything you have to say all at once. You have to keep coming back to it. All ideas are connected. It's true, Latin American writers do tend to digress. Well, may be that is what I am doing in my introduction here. (qtd. in Fox 8)

Other researchers have studied the varied rhetorics among cultures. A student from Cote d'Ivoire explains to Leki his frustration with the ideas of hitting the reader over the head with a main point right from the start:

If you want to talk to me about something and you already said it, why should I listen further? "I'm going!" he said, getting up abruptly and walking to the door to emphasize his point. "You try to make a sort of suspense," he added, "and as we say: It brings appetite to conversations you know? The person is thinking, 'What is he going to tell me?' And you really pull him to listen to you, you see? And finally you say it. And by the time you say it, you are also at the end of what you were going to say." (qtd. in Leki 18)

Arab rhetoric can be misread as well, and sometimes diminished by its readers, as Yorkey's research shows:

Arabic rhetoric encourages the ability to find another way to say the same thing, and the Arabic language is rich enough to permit a skillful user to succeed in constructing complex parallels of ideas. Unfortunately, an English-speaking reader may take this planned coordination as simple repetition. The Arabic word for "and" is "wa" and it is said that English teachers at the University of Beirut, when Beirut was still a city, jokingly referred to the wa-wa method of organizing writing. (Leki 100)

This cultural disjuncture is one which Native American students experience as well. Bliss uses the Lakota rhetoric as an example, described to her in a letter from a friend, to show how digressive storytelling might dominate an effort to persuade, but which academic readers would find confusing:

Lakota persuasion can, like English or Japanese, be blunt when presented as an order. But, in a more involved attempt at explanation or persuasion, the Lakota speaker will tell stories, often four or more, that are somehow related to the topic at hand. The speaker confirms his or her proposition through the stories, which, though they may not even mention the speaker's major claim, are intended to help the listener understand the situation and come to the same conclusion as the speaker. (qtd. in Bliss 19)

There are many ways in which the definition of good writing can vary from culture to culture. Below is a list of some features of good writing from other cultures that are different from the features valued in western academic writing:

Some Features of Good Writing in Other Cultures

- Conscientious attention to surrounding context rather than to the subject itself
- Extensive preliminaries
- Stories that seem unrelated to the main point but that are meant to give the reader the feel of the situation
- Digressive or extraneous material that seems unrelated to a main idea
- Abstract language
- No stated position or thesis
- Reader-responsible prose
- Undocumented sources
- Use of sources to show knowledge rather than to critique them or use them to add weight to an assertion
- Unifying rhetoric meant to show valuing of social solidarity, sometimes in the form of rhetorical questions and a tendency to gloss over specifics that might raise doubts
- Poetic features such as image, metaphor, and inference
- Ambiguity and lack of closure
- Politeness strategies to show respect for the reader's position and intelligence, such as
- Omission
- Indirection
- Respectful silence

(adapted from Helen Fox, *Listening to the World*)

Note that these features are often ones that American university professors use as criteria for ineffective writing. Leki explains how different readings of the same text can result in a "misfit" of writer and reader: "English readers do not rely heavily on analogy, an appeal to intuition, the beauty of language, or a reference to opinions of the learned of antiquity. Yet conventions of argumentation in other cultures may require precisely that recourse to analogy, intuition, beauty, or shared communal wisdom. Thus, a misfit may occur between the writer's and the reader's sense of how to argue a point" (92).

While it is tempting to view these varying rhetorics as superficial structures which students can easily learn, Corbett reminds us that these rhetorics emerge from ideologies, and one ideology is not easily traded for another: "I suggest that these students are unable to negotiate conflicting rhetorics because they contain conflicting ideologies, and students do not have the means of writing about these ideologies without being rhetorically entangled in their contradictions" (Corbett 32).

Corbett suggest we adopt "a pedagogy which acknowledges this conflict [which] will enable L2 students, as well as students whose first language is English but whose rhetoric represents diverse economic and social cultures, to use their resistance as a heuristic by helping them understand it as a rhetorical problem that calls for a rhetorical solution. One such solution is for students to create a new discourse that allows them to negotiate the borders between conflicting rhetoric" (Corbett 32). Panneta urges western academic faculty to make our "Western writing conventions explicit" (8). Matalene recommends we see our rhetorical tradition as one of many, with its own limitations: "But Western rhetoric is only Western. As we commit ourselves to reinventing our own rhetorical tradition, we need to understand the limits as well as the virtues of tradition. And as our world becomes a global village in with ethno-centrism is a less and less appropriate response, we need to understand and appreciate rhetorical systems that are different than our own" (79).

Fox recommends that we see these rhetorical/cultural conflicts as opportunities for our own enrichment: " But while cultural collisions always have the potential to produce shock or distaste, they also have inherent in them the power to enrich the way both the world majority and the western minority understand and experience the world" (126).

II. Best Classroom Practices for Working with ESL/Multicultural Writers

Allow ESL students time

Composing in a non-native language is very demanding. Students might need help analyzing an assignment, or unpacking the cultural context that native English speakers have readily at hand. Moreover, ESL students might need to read material before writing, which for some is a very slow and laborious process. If possible, provide students with an assignment early enough that they have time to draft and revise. ESL students need time.

Provide "Live" Feedback for Revision

A responder's comments are less likely to be ignored, and the responder's time more fruitful, if the comments facilitate revision rather than exist in defense of a final grade. If comments are provided on drafts allowing students to revise, rather than provided on a dead text with a final grade, then the process is more likely to make better writers. (See Addendum for "Revision and

Peer Response Strategies for Writing Intensive Course" for suggestion on integrating the revision process into curriculum.)

Avoid marking all errors

While both faculty and students might believe that their job is complete only if all errors are marked, more is to be gained from limited and selective marking. Some ESL students insist that all errors are marked on all writing, and well-meaning faculty mark all errors to help students improve, but research shows that marking all errors does not improve student performance in subsequent writing tasks.

One error might be repeated several times in one essay, and by marking each manifestation of one error, the teacher not only does the work for students, but also can frustrate students with a wall of marks that makes it appear that there are more kinds of errors, when there might be only a few. Since ESL students make large numbers of sentence-level errors and may need special guidance with unfamiliar rhetorical patterns, commentary can easily become overwhelming. Also, it is more effective to mark a rule-driven error pattern once, model one correction, and ask the student to find similar errors.

Leki recommends that readers attend to what are stigmatizing errors first: "Stigmatizing errors are good candidates [for attention], since these are often the same ones made by native speakers and have traditionally been associated with lack of education: formal conventions of appearance (setting appropriate margins, for example), subject-verb agreements, the occasional misuse of forms that native speakers also misuse (theirselves for themselves), or sentence boundary errors. If these types of errors cause irritation or stigmatize students, they should probably not be left to fade out of a student's interlanguage at their own speed" (130).

Give Feedback to Content First

Students need to believe that their readers are as interested in what they have to say as much as or more than they are concerned with sentence-level correctness. It is therefore effective to first give feedback on content. This is not to say that a responder must ignore errors, but rather that there should be clear cues that the reader is engaging with the writer's ideas. After responding to content, a responder can address the most salient errors, but it is best to make limited and prioritized comments on errors.

Make Global and Local Distinctions

It is more effective to address the errors that affect meaning, and to distinguish between "local" and "global" errors. Local errors are those which disturb only a small portion of a text—a missing article, for example, or an incorrect preposition. A global error has a greater effect on understanding and might be, for that reason, considered more "serious" or more appropriate for correction. Global errors may involve incorrect lexical choices but they usually disturb syntax.

Example:

English language use much people.

There are two local errors (the English language and many people) and one global error, the order of the words.

If both the local errors are corrected (The English language use many people), the sentence is still difficult to understand; if just the global error is corrected (Much people use English language), the sentence is more acceptable. It seems reasonable that if only some errors are to be corrected, they should be the ones that create the greatest potential for misunderstanding. (Example from Burt and Kiparsky in Leki)

Use Peer Responding

Peer groups, when guided and managed, can be very effective for helping writers learn to be critical of their own work. With helpful guidance, such as Peer Response Guides and Rubrics, ESL students can learn to provide helpful responses to others' writing, and to critique their own. (See "Revision and Peer Response Strategies for Writing Intensive Courses.")

Not Bad But Different

Make comments that reflect awareness of different rhetorical traditions. Students will be more receptive to comments if it is clear that their writing is judged as not "bad," but rather "different."

Provide Written Assignments and Instructions

ESL students need hard copy of assignments because ability can vary in listening skills. Students can spend so much cognitive effort trying to understand the assignment if given verbally, that what gets written can be inaccurate and incomplete.

Complement Written Feedback with Conferences When Possible

Oral conferences can be very effective to complement written feedback on ESL students' writing, but professors need to be aware that non-native students might say, out of politeness, that they understand what their professors are saying. Also, some ESL students are unaccustomed to the availability of professors for conferences, and are not familiar with the give-and-take of dialogue expected in a conference, as they are accustomed to more formal and distant educators. Professors may need to explain the purpose of office hours.

Be aware of political differences

It is easy to assume others' understanding of the belief and value systems that drive our choices. However, it is important and effective to make cultural contexts explicit, and to not assume non-

native students understand the cultural and political contexts that native speakers more readily understand.

Make Assignment Expectations and Assumptions Explicit

ESL students find it helpful if professors do more than provide rules and conventions. It is helpful to explain the assumptions behind the conventions, in the context of an awareness of different rhetorics and conventions that may drive students' writing choices. Providing and explaining models of specific kinds of writing can be very effective.

Consider Reader Expectations

As much as faculty and ESL students desire and work toward error-free writing, this is an unrealistic expectation. ESL students can become very fluent writers in English, but they may never become indistinguishable from a native speaker. Some researchers encourage faculty to evaluate their expectations of what ESL students can realistically accomplish. Many who research and teach in the ESL field are asking for readers to have reasonable expectations of ESL proficiency, suggesting that it is the readers who need to learn to read differently.

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