

PART ONE: WRITING

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ESL and EFL Writing Instruction: Challenges and opportunities

1. Introduction

Within the field of L2 writing, much of the published literature has focused on ESL writing, that is, writing in English that takes place in contexts where English is the dominant surrounding language. This literature on ESL writing has addressed a range of topics, including writers' texts (Connor and Kaplan 1987, Panetta 2001), the interplay between reading and writing (Belcher and Hirvela 2001, Carson and Leki 1993, Grabe 2003), first language use in ESL writing (Uzawa 1996), and assessment (Cumming et al. 2003, Hamp-Lyons 1991, Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2000). Additionally, much of the ESL writing literature has explored various teaching practices in ESL writing classrooms, including teacher feedback (Ferris 2003, Hyland and Hyland 2001), error correction (Bitchener and Knoch 2010, Ferris 2002, 2004, Truscott 1996, 1999), the use of peer feedback (Carson and Nelson 1994, Leki 1990, Liu and Hansen 2002, Lundstrom and Baker 2009), the use of multiple drafts (Ferris and Hedgcock 2005), instruction on integrating sources into writing (Wette 2010), and the use of technology (Pennington 2003).

While it is encouraging to see a plethora of research on a range of topics within the field of ESL writing, it is important to recognize that writing and writing instruction in EFL contexts can be quite different from that of ESL contexts. For example, unlike ESL writers, students writing in EFL are not surrounded by the target language and thus may have lower overall English-language proficiency

than ESL writers. Additionally, while ESL writers usually have immediate needs for writing in English because they are typically working or studying in an English-speaking environment, EFL writers may not have clear immediate purposes for writing in English, nor may they be able to anticipate specific future needs for writing in English. These contrasting situations relate to motivation for writing, with ESL writers perhaps feeling more motivated than EFL writers to improve their English-language writing skills, given their more immediate needs. Another difference between ESL and EFL writing is that classroom instructional contexts may be quite distinct. In ESL settings, especially at the university level, ESL writing is typically taught as a separate course, one that may parallel similar courses in writing aimed at native English speakers. (In some cases, ESL writers in university settings may take their writing classes with native English speakers.) In the ESL context, helping students develop writing skills is usually seen as a legitimate end in and of itself. In contrast, writing instruction in EFL settings may be integrated with instruction in other English-language skills or topics, such as reading, grammar, listening and speaking, and writing may be seen (perhaps appropriately) as a means of reinforcing grammar or vocabulary, or as a means of demonstrating one's proficiency in these areas, as well as a means of demonstrating comprehension of an assigned reading passage. Additionally, since in EFL contexts, writing is often integrated with instruction in other skills, it may not be given much time or attention, especially if instructors have little training or experience in teaching writing, and if they are overburdened with a large number of students.

Given the significant differences between ESL and EFL writing, it is important that a theory of L2 writing take into account the instructional practices common in EFL writing contexts. Manchón (2009: xiii) notes that there are increasing number of L2 writers in foreign language (FL) contexts, and she argues that "failing to consider writing practices in FL settings badly distorts our understanding of L2 writing." In fact, some authors do address writing and writing instruction in EFL contexts. For example, EFL writing researchers have analyzed EFL writers' texts (Chiang 2003; de Haan & van Esch 2005; Hyland 2004) and have conducted research on EFL writers' individual differences (Ferenz 2005; Kamimura 2000; Leibowitz 2005). Additionally, researchers have investigated writers' processes and strategies in a range of contexts (Armengol-Castells 2001; Ellis & Yuan 2004; Stevenson et al. 2006; Wang & Wen 2002). Researchers have also tested the effects of various pedagogical procedures in EFL writing instruction, including the effects of computer-based learning (Al-Jarf 2004; Braine 2001), various types of written feedback (Duppenthaler 2002), journal writing (Duppenthaler 2004, Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini 2005), collaborative writing (Kuiken & Vedder 2002); peer response (Min 2006); and grammar instruction (Manley & Calk 1997). In the EFL writing literature describing pedagogical practices, authors advocate a range of pedagogical practices, including integrating reading and writing (Abu Rass 2001), implementing cross-cultural exchanges (Daoud 1998), using authentic writing for specific purposes (Flowerdew

2001), extracurricular writing (Huang 1998), grammar instruction (Muncie 2002), and using exchange journals (Worthington 1998).

In this chapter, my purpose is to pull together information from these two strands, ESL writing and EFL writing, drawing on the EFL literature as well as my own experiences teaching and researching L2 writing. Citing examples from Poland, Germany, the U.S., China, Japan, and Spain, I argue that various L2 writing contexts provide L2 writing specialists with significant obstacles and challenges, but they also offer important opportunities. I especially emphasize that the distinct features of the EFL context provide opportunities and advantages for teaching writing that are not present in ESL contexts. I argue that EFL writing should continue to develop its own body of literature, which has potential to shape writing-related research and practice in both ESL and EFL contexts. In this discussion, I draw on my 20 years of experience teaching ESL writing, as well as experience researching EFL writing instruction in various contexts (Reichelt 1997, 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009a, 2009b). I also draw on my background in researching writing instruction in various other foreign languages (Cimasko and Reichelt 2011, Reichelt 2001, 2009a, 2009b, 2011), including German as a foreign language (Reichelt and Bryant 2001) and Turkish as a foreign language (Yigitoglu and Reichelt, forthcoming) in the U.S.

2. Challenges and opportunities: ESL writing instruction at the University of Toledo

First, I would like to describe the context I am most familiar with: the ESL writing program that I direct at the University of Toledo, which is located in the city of Toledo in the U.S. state of Ohio. Writing instruction at the University of Toledo is somewhat typical of writing instruction in many U.S. universities. Students enrolled in ESL writing courses come from a range of majors, with a heavy concentration in areas such as engineering and business. When international students arrive at the University of Toledo, they immediately take an ESL writing placement test in which they have two hours to write an essay of 250 words or more on a given topic. The placement tests are scored by the ESL writing staff, who have undergone extensive scorer training.

Each essay is read by two to three scorers who ask themselves one simple question: Is the student ready for Composition I for ESL students? (Composition I is a writing course required of all students, both native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Special ESL sections of this course are taken by ESL students.) If so, the student is placed in an ESL section of Composition I. If the scorers determine that the student is not ready for Composition I-ESL, the student is placed into a course entitled English 1020, which is designed to help ESL students improve their writing and prepare for Composition I-ESL.

In the lower-level course, English 1020, students undertake in-class writing and also do five major assignments: a writing autobiography; an article summary; and three practice essay exams, designed to be similar in format to the placement exam and to the exit exam, which students in this course must pass at the end of the semester. The course focuses especially on helping students organize their writing and write clear sentences.

In the higher-level course, Composition I-ESL, students choose a topic in their major and write several papers on this topic, leading to a five-page documented research paper on the topic. (For example, a biology major might choose to explore the viability of artificial blood.) These papers include a report about an interview with an expert on their topic, usually a professor; a short research proposal; an extended response to one of the sources they will use for their research paper; a casebook in which they present summaries and responses to the sources they will use in their research paper; and, finally, the research paper itself.

One of the positive opportunities that ESL instructors at the University of Toledo, and in many university ESL contexts, can take advantage of is the fact that many ESL students in the U.S. feel that English-language writing skills are necessary survival tools for their studies. In other words, unlike many EFL writing students, ESL writers have an immediate need for English-language writing skills. Additionally, since they are surrounded by the target language, it is possible that students' exposure to the target language can enhance their writing skills. At the University of Toledo, class size is limited to 16 students, which allows instructors to provide students with individualized attention and feedback on their writing.

These factors, then, enhance the teaching of ESL writing at the University of Toledo. However, significant challenges in teaching ESL writing are also present in this context. For one, students in the ESL writing program come from a range of majors (e.g. engineering, science, business) and may have very little interest in learning English for its own sake. Additionally, the university accepts students with relatively low levels of English-language proficiency. A large proportion of the ESL undergraduate students matriculate through an on-campus intensive English program, which allows them to bypass the regular TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), normally required for entry to the university. The intensive English program administers an in-house TOEFL—one which does not include writing—and students with a score of 450-500 can enter the university, even if they have done poorly in their writing classes. To their credit, the intensive English program at my institution has a very strong writing curriculum and good teachers. Nonetheless, many of the students who enter the university are still struggling with the basics of writing.

Another challenge that is particular to this program is that the ESL students in the program come from a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds. Of course, this makes for an interesting intercultural experience for teachers and students alike, but it also poses significant challenges. For

example, many of the students from Arabic-speaking backgrounds have very strong command of oral English but lack experience and proficiency in English-language writing. In contrast, many of the students from Asia have lower levels of oral English proficiency—and are also reluctant to speak much in class for cultural reasons—but may have relatively strong writing skills as well as experience with writing both in English and their native language. This mix in the classroom can be challenging for teachers.

Additionally, there are a small but troublesome number of students who commit plagiarism in their ESL writing courses. Of course, students receive extensive instruction regarding how to summarize, paraphrase, and quote other authors' works, and they are educated about the strict line taken against plagiarism by U.S. universities, including the University of Toledo. If a student's plagiarism is inadvertent—for example, if a student relies a bit too heavily on an author's phrasing without realizing that s/he is committing plagiarism—the instructor works with the student to educate him/her and then requires the student to revise the work. But we also have students who copy large blocks of texts from sources without citing them, and, occasionally, students who “borrow” an entire paper from another student. Part of the explanation for this, no doubt, is that students feel overwhelmed by the amount of work that goes into writing a research paper, and perhaps don't feel up to the task. Students may struggle not only with improving their writing, but also with understanding the notion of plagiarism and learning to quote, summarize, paraphrase, and use proper documentation, all of which may be very new to them. Instructors are diligent about attending to plagiarism, but dealing with these cases and their complexities is, again, a significant distraction for the instructors, all of whom are inexperienced teaching assistants (TAs).

The fact that all of the instructors on the program are inexperienced TAs presents both a challenge and an opportunity in the program. These TAs are MA students in their first or second year of the University of Toledo's MA program in teaching ESL, and they each teach one class in exchange for a tuition waiver and a very modest salary. (The use of TAs to teach writing, including ESL writing, is a common practice in U.S. universities.) When TAs begin the MA program in teaching ESL, they typically have no teaching experience although some international TAs have experience teaching English—but usually not writing—in their home countries. TAs begin teaching their own class on their very first day of their master's program. They are provided with a detailed syllabus for their class and about six weeks' worth of detailed lesson plans to follow.

During their first semester, TAs are required to take a course in teaching ESL writing and to attend regular staff meetings where TAs can bring up their concerns. Additionally, they meet one-on-one with the Director of ESL Writing (myself), who reviews their comments on drafts of their students' first papers and reviews their grades on the final draft of that paper. The TAs in the program are typically devoted, intelligent teachers who work together; however, just as each one gains

confidence and expertise in teaching ESL writing, she or he graduates! Despite this challenge, the TAs bring many strengths to their teaching: They are open to new teaching ideas and to sharing their challenges and successes with me and their fellow teachers. Additionally, the returning TAs informally mentor the new TAs, providing support in ways that peers can do better than a supervisor. While there would be benefits to having a permanent staff of seasoned, veteran teachers, having TAs staff the ESL writing courses at the University of Toledo also provides important advantages.

Writing instruction in this particular ESL context, then, is enhanced by the fact that students study in small classes, benefit from being surrounded by the target language, and may be motivated by the fact that they have immediate needs for writing in English. However, although students have immediate needs for writing in English, they may not be terribly motivated to write in English, and in some cases, they may see their English writing course as more of an obstacle between themselves and their academic goals, rather than viewing it as it is intended, that is, as a means of helping them achieve these goals. Additionally, the fact that students may enter this university with relatively low English proficiency, including low levels of writing skill, also provides instructors with significant challenges. These factors, among others, can lead to cases of plagiarism, which place an additional burden on teachers. The heterogeneous nature of the ESL student body can also make it difficult for instructors to meet all students' varying needs. Since the instructors in this program are quite inexperienced, coping with these challenges can be especially difficult for them.

3. Challenges of EFL writing contexts

What about EFL writing instruction? What challenges and opportunities do EFL writing instructors face? A review of the literature on EFL writing instruction provides, in many cases, a grim outlook: It tells of teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and overworked teachers, which means that it may be impossible for instructors to provide individualized attention to students' writing. Teachers with little preparation in teaching writing may minimize English-language writing instruction or focus primarily on grammatical form. In contrast, teachers who have learned about English-language writing approaches in English-dominant countries or programs may attempt to impose those approaches in other contexts, perhaps inappropriately, or, as Casanave (2009) describes, may struggle with whether doing so is realistic or desirable. I'm referring here to practice such as the use of process approaches to writing including the use of multiple drafts and peer review, commonly used in ESL writing contexts, for example. Besides these challenges, EFL students may lack not only L2 writing experience, but L1 (first language) writing experience as well; additionally, EFL students' often low-levels

of English-language proficiency may make English-language writing seem like a daunting task, especially since, in EFL contexts (unlike ESL contexts), the English classroom may be the only significant source of English-language input. In EFL contexts, writing curricula may focus on training students to pass standardized tests that call for formulaic types of essays.

For example, You (2004, 2005) writes that in China, where English is the most-studied foreign language, English classes are often focused on preparing students for standardized exams, which typically include a short essay. Large class sizes are common, and teachers' low salaries, combined with a high demand for English and a shortage of English teachers, lead many teachers to seek additional teaching employment outside of their colleges, which means that teachers are often too overloaded to provide individual attention to students' writing.

Similarly, in Japan, large classes exist both at the secondary and university level. An emphasis on rote learning (especially at the secondary level), and, according to Hyde (2002: 16), little tolerance for error can foster a sense that English is "inert knowledge to be learnt and then forgotten." Attitudes about English and English language in Japan apply, of course, to perceptions of English-language writing there. Many Japanese secondary school students do not perceive English-language writing as important for their future study or careers, although in recent years, many public universities have added an English writing passage of 80-150 words to the university entrance exam (Rinnert & Kobayashi 2009). According to Hirose (2001), at the university level, Japanese non-English majors often do not perceive a need for writing in English, perhaps because authentic purposes for EFL writing are sometimes difficult to identify.

As is the case in some other EFL contexts, in Spain, writing has traditionally received little emphasis compared to other skills in EFL classes (Chaudron et al. 2005). Similarly, Spanish students receive little explicit instruction in L1 composition (Victori 1999). According to Ordóñez de Celis (2005), English-language writing in Spain is often reduced to a grammatical exercise involving manipulation of structures in support of the target language or oral practice; rarely is it viewed as a creative process in which students can communicate personal information in an independent fashion.

As I learned from a recent visit to the English Institute at the University of Lodz, Poland, teachers of English-language writing in this context also face significant challenges. One major challenge at the university level is to help students majoring in English to overcome dread or anxiety that they may feel about writing in English and to see writing as something that can be meaningful and enjoyable. Additionally, English-language writing instructors face the challenge of helping to prepare students to write their very demanding BA (Bachelor of Arts) and MA thesis projects.

In EFL contexts, then, students and instructors alike face significant challenges. If students have little experience with writing and writing instruction in English (and

perhaps even in the L1), and if instructors have little training in teaching L2 writing in their very challenging contexts, it may be difficult to motivate students, especially if students dread writing in English and feel no immediate needs for doing so. Given such a daunting situation, overworked teachers may de-emphasize writing or focus on writing as primarily a grammatical exercise, simply in order to survive.

4. Opportunities in EFL writing contexts

On the one hand, a lack of a clear, immediate purpose for English-language writing in EFL contexts is a drawback, making curricular decisions challenging, and creating a situation in which students may not feel motivated to write in English without a clear purpose. However, this lack of a clear, immediate need for writing also provides unique opportunities that are not available in the ESL context.

For example, on the one hand, writing courses for students in ESL contexts often focus on academic writing tasks in order to prepare students for further academic writing in their university careers. Students might focus especially on writing from source texts, complete summaries, responses to texts, essay exams, and document research papers, for example. This type of instruction is very practical and fulfills an immediate need for students, but it is considered by some to be quite boring. The demanding nature of academic writing, coupled with the short time frame in which students have to attempt to master it, leaves little time for assignments that students might perceive as more interesting and enjoyable. In contrast, students in EFL settings, without the immediate demands of academic writing, may have more freedom. As Tarnopolsky (2000) describes in his article about writing instruction in Ukraine, they might use this freedom to engage in playful, creative writing. Tarnopolsky argues that, in order to be successful in the Ukrainian context, English-language writing instruction must be *fun*. He outlines several activities that he has used in teaching writing. These include absurd writing, in which students write zany descriptions of everyday items and absurd narratives; they might also transform “normal” texts into absurd ones. He also had students work as a group to write a single narrative, with each student writing one or two sentences and then passing the incomplete story to his/her neighbor. Additionally, Tarnopolsky incorporates writing stories with a moral; writing stories to illustrate proverbs; and writing fairy tales about the life and adventures of an object in the classroom.

Another similar type of motivating writing assignments that students in EFL can undertake is known as the creative-productive approach, advocated by Beile (1996), Böttcher (1996), Holtwisch (1996), Nunning (1995), and Piepho (1998). The creative-productive approach involves students writing in response to a text, usually with the stipulation of a specific context and audience. For example, students might be asked to read a short story and then write a letter that one character might write to another, to fill a “gap” in a story by writing a scene that

is absent but could exist, to write one part of a dialogue when the other part is provided, or to write the end of a story after hearing only the beginning. Creative-productive writing tasks may also require students to change the form of a given text, e.g., by narrating a story from a different character's perspective, transforming a poem into prose or vice versa, re-writing a text for a younger audience, or turning a narrative into dialogue. Menzel (1984) describes these types of text-based creative writing assignments as linguistic play and asserts that such tasks enable students to identify with texts and to achieve both emotional and intellectual nearness to their content, thus understanding the texts better.

In some cases, however, it is not practical in EFL contexts to focus entirely on purely "fun" assignments. This is especially true for students majoring in English or other fields that require them to do advanced academic writing, such as a thesis, in English. English majors in EFL contexts, who may undertake several years of writing instruction in English, can be led from more personal, fun, or reflective writing to writing that is more academically-oriented. For example, at the Institute of English in Lodz, English majors are required to write a BA thesis, a very demanding task that requires in-depth research and strong academic writing skills. However, students may need to work up to this task by doing more personal or reflective writing assignments, especially in cases where students dread writing in English. One class of second-year English majors that I met at the English Institute in Lodz was undertaking a variety of interesting and motivating EFL writing activities, designed to foster a positive attitude toward writing in English. Students wrote regularly in journals, and their instructor provided feedback that was encouraging rather than purely critical. One of the students in the class commented on how important and helpful she found this "positive reinforcement." Students also read a selection about writing myths and then drafted letters of advice to incoming first-year English majors, describing their own experiences with writing, both positive and negative, and providing tips and insights about writing, intended to help first-year English majors with writing in English during their university careers. After participating in peer review, these students revised their letters and gave them to their instructor to pass on to the following year's incoming students. The students seemed to find this task very engaging, no doubt at least in part because they were writing for a real audience who could benefit from their insights.

Besides using the writing assignments and approaches described above, writing instruction in EFL contexts can be integrated with the teaching of other skills and can be used to support overall target language development and reading skills. While some might lament that this makes writing subordinate to other skills, this use of writing may be appropriate, at least sometimes, in EFL environments, given the fact that there are not always clear, immediate needs for students to write in the English. Writing can also be used in EFL contexts to explore the cultures of the English-speaking world as well as locally-relevant topics (Guilherme 2007).

5. Conclusion

While teaching EFL writing provides significant challenges, the distinct features of the EFL context also provide opportunities and advantages for teaching writing that are not present in ESL contexts. In order to support the teaching of English-language writing in EFL contexts, EFL writing should continue to develop its own body of literature, which has potential to shape writing-related research and practice not only in EFL contexts, but in all L2 writing contexts, including ESL contexts.

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