

The Linguistically-Diverse Student

Guest Editor's Introduction

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In the worlds inhabited by linguistically-diverse students, two distinguishable teaching environments appear in the literature: the English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts (e.g., United States, Australia, the United Kingdom), where English is the language of the country and the medium of instruction in its colleges and universities; and the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (e.g., France, Egypt, Mexico), in countries where other languages are dominant, and English is taught as a foreign language, much as French or Arabic is taught in the United States. Though as I will note later, these distinctions have become somewhat blurred over time, especially in English-speaking countries, historically, different kinds of curricular and pedagogical choices have been made for the two types of contexts.

When I began teaching ESL reading and writing to linguistically-diverse college students in the United States more than thirty years ago, pedagogical choices were relatively simple. Options for ESL college writing classes included only one advanced textbook, Robert Bander's *American English Rhetoric* (1971), based upon Current-Traditional theory (the "modes"). The students were, for the most part, international, academically literate in their first languages and well prepared for university study in English. After a single, general writing class and some brushing up on their English grammar, these students appeared to be ready for university work at any academic level without requiring assistance from their instructors in the disciplines.

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments during the same period, more specialized work was in process, particularly in those areas where cross-disciplinary ventures under the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) rubric were being developed. In his valuable historical collection, *Episodes in ESP* (1985), John Swales establishes 1962 as the date for the first published ESP research: on the grammar of scientific English. Swales' own ground-breaking volume, *Writing Scientific English*, prepared in Libya, was published in 1971; and other ESP volumes, such as the *Nucleus General Science* (1976) series, adopted for use in a number of countries, soon followed. The *Nucleus* volumes, focusing primarily on grammar and vocabulary, were written by applied linguists and EFL teachers; however, some consideration was given to discourse and context, as well. In 1980, there appeared a more general ESP series, including a basic, low-proficiency volume focusing upon selected academic grammar and vocabulary, a second upon academic concepts, a third upon communicative functions (e.g., to claim), and a final, advanced volume, devoted to reading and critical thinking across the curriculum, the skills found to be central to EFL student success. The principal author of the advanced volume, John Moore, made the following claims about his textbook and its contents:

1. There is a core of academic language, such as certain structures of argument or forms of presentation, common to most disciplines.
2. Reading is a purposive activity and these purposes must be established prior to processing the text.

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3. The reading process involves a dialogue between the reader and writer and therefore an interactive approach based upon group and pair work is central.
4. Reading and discussing that reading are closely related academic activities, so spoken communication is common to all lessons.
5. In order to implement these principles, attention needs to be given to the learning setting: classroom layout, the role of the teacher and group dynamics are all important considerations (Quoted in Swales, 1988, pp. 158-59).

Thus since the 1970s, specialized curricula have been written to prepare EFL students for academic study across the curriculum, principally for the sciences[1].

Why did ESP, a WAC-related movement for the linguistically-diverse student, thrive in EFL contexts? There are several reasons. EFL students needed to have rapid, focused access to the language and discourses of their academic disciplines; and in the sciences, technology, and medicine, in particular, current disciplinary research and textbooks were available principally in English. Though writing was important in some contexts (see, e.g., Swales, 1971), reading, grammar, vocabulary, and critical thinking tended to be more central to EFL student needs in other situations[2]. In addition, many of the international post-secondary institutions in which the students were enrolled, and the students themselves, viewed English as the language of imperialism, so there was little encouragement to study the "general" language and cultures of the English-speaking world.

In North America, where English is the medium of instruction, a different history unfolded. David Russell (1994) notes that since the Progressive Movement in the early 20th Century, there has been a tension in post-secondary educational goals for all students between "the pressure to increase specialization of knowledge and professional work" (the focus of ESP curricula) and "the pressure to integrate more fully an ever-widening number of citizens into intellectually meaningful activity within mass society" (p. 3). The WAC movement was designed to assist in resolving that tension, "born out of a desire to make the mass education system more equitable and inclusive but, at the same time, more rational in its pursuit of disciplinary excellence and the differentiation of knowledge and work that drives modern (and postmodern) society" (Russell, 1994, p.3). Not surprisingly, the tensions remain in post-secondary education, taking on a particular salience in the many North American institutions that enroll a number of linguistically-diverse students.

What is the nature of current tensions in and with ESL post-secondary education in North America? At this point, many types of linguistically-diverse students with a variety of needs are enrolled in our educational institutions (See, e.g., Leki, 1992), and this variety requires, ideally, a collection of classes. We can no longer take one approach to the teaching of ESL literacies. The international students remain, though there has been a slight decline in their numbers since 9/11 (See <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=29115>). However, our colleges also enroll an increasing number of immigrant and refugee students, some of whom are not fully academically literate in their first languages or in English, though many have experienced their formal education in English-medium schools. Scarcella (1996), attempting to discover reasons for this educational dilemma, notes that in the recent past, K-12 classes in the United States have de-emphasized linguistic form (grammar) and corrective feedback as Whole Language and other top-down approaches to literacy have become popular (See, e.g., Grabe & Stoller, for a discussion of top-down and bottom-up approaches). Therefore, learners may come to college with fossilized linguistic forms and a grammar and vocabulary inadequate for post-secondary academic reading and writing. Harklau, Losey, and Seigal refer to these American-educated students caught between two languages and cultures as "Generation 1.5" (1999).

In addition to the multiplicity of student groups and needs, the tensions mentioned by Russell (1994) between "the specialization of knowledge" and "intellectually meaningful activity" are also in play. Some ESL

composition teachers have taken a strong stand against the teaching of specialized discourses from the disciplines advocated in ESP. In "Initiating ESL Students into Academic Discourse Communities: How Far Should We Go?", Spack argues that an ESL composition course should "be a humanities course: a place where students are provided the enrichment of reading and writing that provokes thought and fosters their intellectual and ethical development" (1988, p. 46). Spack also implies that ESL instructors cannot, and should not, assist students or faculty with writing across the curriculum issues, for "writing tasks are fundamentally situated and multiple" (p. 47) and thus must be dealt with in authentic academic contexts.[3] Disagreements about the functions of ESL undergraduate writing classes persist in our professional organizations (e.g., Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/ TESOL) and in the literature (see Casanave, 2004). Though some ESL professionals have been involved in developing cross-curricular content-based instruction in K-12 education (See, e.g., Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 2003), and a few post-secondary ESL instructors have collaborated in the development of cross-disciplinary programs (See, e.g., Johns 1997, 2001a), the majority of ESL instructors in North America appear to have isolated themselves (or been isolated from) the WAC/WID movements and related cross-disciplinary enterprises[4].

There are other reasons for the tensions in North American ESL. Many linguistically-diverse students object to, or are intimidated by, the subjugation of their linguistic lives and habits to academic languages and discourses. As Canagarajah notes (2002), the multilingual student is particularly sensitive to the ways in which established literacies function "to maintain the power of the academic community" (p. 145). This power is imposed upon linguistically-diverse students by disciplinary faculty and composition instructors in distinct ways, e.g., through faculty distaste for "foreign" grammatical errors (Vann, Meyer, and Lorenz, 1984) and through what many ESL students consider to be inappropriate penalties for "plagiarism" (Pennycook, 1997).[5] Finally, many linguistically-diverse undergraduates realize that extended writing is seldom assigned in their general education classes or their majors, most of which are in the sciences, computer sciences, or engineering; thus they resist both composition classes and some WAC/WID approaches (see Leki, 2003). When conducting a cross-disciplinary academic survey many years ago (1981), I found that listening and reading were more central to undergraduate ESL (and monolingual) student success than was writing. The situation has not changed, according to my ESL students. The picture in graduate school is considerably different because course papers and theses are required; fortunately, the Swales and Feak volumes (2000, 2004) exist for both ESL students and their instructors at advanced levels.

Different concerns related to the linguistically-diverse students are on the minds of literacy instructors in Europe and other parts of the world[6] at this time. Until recently, most international post-secondary institutions did not see a need for WAC/WID or for academic writing instruction because their programs were highly selective, limiting enrollment through examination to those students who were linguistically proficient, generally in more than one language. However, changes are taking place as many countries witness an influx of immigrants who require additional instruction in both local languages and English, the international language. Though many international institutions continue to resist the establishment of writing classes, especially at the undergraduate level, a growing number are building writing centers and web-based assistance as well as working with faculty across the disciplines to encourage WAC/WID initiatives (See Björk, Bräuer, Rinenecker, and Stray Jørgensen [2003] and Johns [2003] for discussions of work in European universities.)

It would be impossible to summarize the considerable literature or histories of ESL/EFL or ESP in a short introduction of this type. Suffice it to say that most international scholars and faculty have been much more interested in the analysis and production of specialized languages and discourses, whereas North American ESL has concentrated more upon the nature and content of undergraduate writing courses, particularly at the freshman level. However, there are parallels between the international contexts and the North American ones, the most significant of which is that in all parts of the world, post-secondary faculty across the disciplines are discovering linguistically-diverse students in their classes. We are all immersed in linguistic diversity at this point, whether or not we are prepared for the teaching challenges that result.

Contents of this Issue

As has been the case recently, this issue of *Across the Disciplines* will be a rolling publication; contributions from various parts of the world will be appearing throughout 2005. The first of these, by Stoller, Jones, Constanza-Robinson, and Robinson, focuses upon a genre-based writing curriculum in a North American undergraduate chemistry course. Though to many WAC/WID professionals, this course resembles an upper-division writing course in the disciplines at their universities, there are elements that make it unusual, both for undergraduates and for the linguistically-diverse student. First of all, the project represents a true collaboration among ESP/ESL and disciplinary specialists; each group has made major contributions to the curriculum. The language specialists "demystified" genre theory and analyzed the texts selected by the chemists, using the tools of corpus linguistics to discover not only typical vocabulary but repeated grammatical features. These discoveries, combined with the genre analysis, became the core of the writing curriculum. The chemists identified, named, and assisted in the analysis of their genres, discussed the values of their disciplinary community (e.g., the specialized use of visuals), and provided expertise in terms of professional journal selection and paper assessment. Relatively rare, this thorough collaboration between subject and ESP/ESL specialists gives us a model for a curriculum based upon specified grammar and vocabulary as well as upon the rhetoric of the discipline.

The second article appearing in this issue is by Sarah Rich, a member of the TESOL faculty at the University of Exeter (UK). In this paper, Rich identifies an issue central to a growing controversy in the applied linguistics/ESL literature: the influence of first culture upon students' second culture literacies and academic practices. Rich argues that the current approaches to faculty professional development that point to international students' socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds as predictors of their responses to Western academic study are misguided because they provide "overly simplistic conceptualizations" of student cultures and motivations and "are informed by theories which fail to give adequate prominence to a view of learning as a situated and dynamic response to a new setting." Using semi-structured interviews with twelve international students, she follows them through their first academic year in a graduate program in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language). Rich finds that students use a variety of strategies in their efforts to succeed in their classes and join a new community of practice. As they become increasingly initiated, they shed old strategies and preferences for classroom pedagogies and adopt new ones. In these efforts, individual agency plays a much greater role than does first language or culture.

The third contribution to this volume, by Gavin Melles at the University of Melbourne (Australia), reports on a course enrolling two groups of international graduate students, both studying engineering in his ESL setting. Melles describes the major assignment, the literature review, a classroom or transitional genre which enables students to develop critical and literate practices for their disciplines. He shows how the literature review unfolds in a series of papers and how each paper was assessed. Then, he reports on a succession of interviews in which the international students reveal their personal, cultural, and linguistic concerns about the assignment and its goals, their sometimes halting processes as they attempted to complete the papers, their tendencies to "plagiphase" in the first drafts, and, in the end, their general satisfaction with the literature review project.

The fourth contribution comes from an EFL context, the University of Groningen, in the Netherlands. There, Angeniet Kam and Yvette Meinema, the authors of this article, are instructors in the university's Expert Centre on Language, Communication, and Education. As the authors note, Centre projects often focus upon "faculty development, raising professionalism, and faculty awareness of Writing-across-the-Curriculum...." The project described here involved workshops for students in the Network on Humanitarian Assistance Master's Degree Program which enrolls international and local students who will be involved in humanitarian relief and assistance throughout the world. The project began when a faculty member in the program requested professional assistance in improving student writing in the required classes. In response, the authors developed a rich and motivating experience for the students, one which

heightened their awareness of professional genres and of the processes for writing required in their professional lives. Of particular value in this article are the scaffolding activities devised by the authors and their universally-applicable suggestions to faculty about assigning and scaffolding writing tasks.

Selecting, critiquing, and publishing these articles has been an enriching experience. I am particularly grateful for the guidance and support offered by Sharon Quiroz, the ATD journal editor, and to Mike Palmquist, who took the issue on-line. Thanks, too, to the work of the expert reviewers, who carefully assisted the authors in revising the manuscripts to make them appropriate for this journal and its readers. And, of course, a special thanks goes to the contributors for their research and insights.

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Notes

- [1] For additional information about the principles and history of English for Specific Purposes, see Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998). Johns & Price-Machado (2001) discuss ESP in the United States, including specialized curricula for the professions and vocations. On-going international ESP publications include *English for Specific Purposes: An International Journal* and *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*.
- [2] It is important to note that extensive and careful student needs assessment and target situation (context) analyses have been integral to ESP curricula for several decades.
- [3] Aviva Freeman (1994) makes a similar argument about teaching genres.
- [4] Of course, we must remind ourselves that most ESL instructors are part-time, as are other native-speaker composition instructors, and few have the time, or opportunities, to build programs.
- [5] See Johns, 2001b, for a summary of ESL issues across the curriculum.
- [6] It is important to note that ESP seems to flourish in former British colonies or in locales where the British Council was dominant. The Middle East and North Africa, Singapore and Hong Kong, and some countries in South America (e.g., Argentina and Chile) seem to have the strongest ESP programs. However, in sections of Northern Europe, France, and Germany, ESP is seldom discussed, particularly among post-secondary educators.

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