

## CHAPTER 2

# DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF A MULTILINGUAL GRADUATE WRITER

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*This is the story of Chozin, a graduate multilingual writer who was an unlikely success story. I followed Chozin through two years in a writing-intensive, interdisciplinary graduate program; here I describe the numerous strategies he developed to overcome writing failures and a low level of English proficiency and then consider how his experience might benefit other writers. Chozin's story deepens our understanding of the strategies multilingual graduate writers use to navigate their programs of study.*

Chozin (Koh-ZEEN) was a bright, engaging Indonesian graduate student who participated in my research project on how international multilingual graduate writers learn to write for their fields. Initially a very poor writer in English, Chozin managed to overcome the low expectations of his advisor (and this researcher) to become a highly successful graduate student in his interdisciplinary program and a much-improved writer. Chozin was a very unlikely success story; thus his experience highlights the resourcefulness that multilingual writers may bring to their writing development. Chozin's particular resourcefulness also deepens our understanding of the strategies multilingual learners use when they encounter writing assignments in the US academy. Chozin's story reminds us too of the value of having a support network and of receiving feedback as we write. Finally, his story provides a compelling example of what it means for a multilingual graduate student to write across multiple, largely unfamiliar, disciplines and of the value of WAC to international students who may not be well prepared for the demands of writing in graduate school.

I begin by describing the larger study that Chozin was part of and then introduce readers to Chozin and his primary professor, Dr. G. before moving to a discussion of some of the key strategies that Chozin developed in order to succeed—strategies for receiving useful feedback, for collaborating successfully on group projects, for managing the data collection process for his papers, and for improving his overall literacy. I conclude by considering the implications of Chozin's experience.

## **INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS' DEVELOPMENT AS WRITERS**

Chozin's eventual success was largely the result of his own diligence and resourcefulness; he was quick to develop successful strategies to overcome his writing challenges and developed a number of these strategies throughout his graduate career. Chozin's case study adds to a growing body of research on international graduate students, including well-known studies by Casanave and Leki. Research by Casanave (2002) and a research collection by Casanave and Li (2008) examine international graduate students' development as writers in great detail. Casanave and Li's (2008) edited collection, for example, provides an unusual yet useful way of understanding how graduate students learn to write. Structured as a series of personal narratives, many by non-native speakers of English, on the graduate writing life, most of the chapters focus on writers encountering new writing challenges and subsequently developing a better understanding of themselves and/or of writing in their disciplines. In *Writing Games*, Casanave (2002) includes a chapter on the academic enculturation of five graduate MATESOL (master's degree in TESOL) students, some of whom were native-English speakers and others non-native English speakers. Casanave's aim is "to look closely at students' experiences with and attitudes toward writing and to discover any changes over time in how the students viewed themselves and their field" (p. 93). Casanave employs the metaphor of "writing games" as she focuses on the writers' shifting identities and on how the MATESOL program functions as a community of practice. Explaining her choice of "game" to describe such a serious topic, Casanave writes that the notion of writing games

seems to depict people's sense that academic writing consists of rule- and strategy-based practices, done in interaction with others for some kind of personal and professional gain, and that it is learned through repeated practice rather than just from a guidebook of how to play. (p. 3)

As I'll show, Chozin learned to play the "writing game," not only through repeated writing experiences but also through the strategy-based practices he developed. (Also see DePalma & Ringer [this volume] for an examination of how L2 writers can and do become effective agents of their own learning as they develop strategies to cope with unfamiliar writing demands and expectations through the process of adaptive transfer). Chozin's story provides an example of how one graduate student adapted his practices to carry out—and sometimes resist—the writing tasks assigned across his courses.

Leki's (1995) study "Coping Strategies of ESL Students in Writing Tasks Across the Curriculum" was the first to attempt to research and catalogue the strategies that multilingual writers employed when they encountered writing assignments. Leki followed five students (three graduates and two undergraduates) through a semester of courses and catalogued their strategic moves, grouping them as follows: clarifying strategies, focusing strategies, relying on past writing experiences, taking advantage of first language/culture, using current experience or feedback, looking for models, using current or past ESL writing training, accommodating teachers' demands, resisting teachers' demands and managing competing demands (1995, p. 240). As I will discuss, Leki's categories provide a good context for analyzing Chozin's resourcefulness at the same time that his experiences also problematize some of Leki's (to be fair, preliminary) categories and suggest new or broader ones. For example, whereas Leki's participants relied on past successful writing experiences for positive transfer to other writing tasks, one of Chozin's most effective strategies was to learn from failure, i.e. to take negative writing experiences and craft a plan to avoid the same outcome in the future.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While in this chapter I'm focusing on Chozin, he was one of five participants in my two-year, IRB-approved study on how incoming international multilingual graduate students learn to write for their fields and the resources they use to support their writing development. Though Chozin is only one writer, Newkirk (1992) argues that although qualitative approaches like the case study have no internal mechanism for generalization (such as a large, representative sample size), these approaches instead allow readers to perform the act of generalization; readers determine whether the case study looks like their own students or classrooms and therefore whether it should inform, alter, or trigger an overhaul of their own theories and pedagogies. Further, Newkirk argues that "the case study gains generalizability through particularity—

through the density of detail, the selection of incidents, the narrative skill of the researcher” (1992, p. 130). The case study thus functions as a heuristic, offering possible explanations and possible solutions to its readers. The reader is then prompted to engage in the analytical act of assessing which features of the case study might best be generalized to his/her own situation and which are irrelevant, perhaps because of differences in contexts. I thus offer Chozin’s story and suggest potential implications, but leave readers to make their own determinations.

Chozin and other participants were recruited through campus flyers and email messages to various international student organizations. I sought and chose participants who were beginning their programs and who had not previously attended an English-medium institution other than to take English-language classes; therefore, these writers would be new to graduate school and new to taking disciplinary courses in English. I also attempted to recruit participants who were linguistically and disciplinarily diverse, though with limited success. Two participants were Chinese, one was Sudanese, and two were Indonesian, one of whom was Chozin. Both Chozin and the other Indonesian participant were in the Southeast Asian Studies program. The remaining students were in linguistics, environmental studies, and communication studies.

I followed these five writers through the first year of their programs and continued to follow Chozin and another participant for a second year until they completed their master’s degrees. I recorded audio interviews with them at least twice a month, collected copies of the syllabi for their courses and their drafts and final papers with teacher responses, and interviewed the instructors who made themselves available after the term had ended. For Chozin, I analyzed six seminar papers, two conference papers, three drafts of his thesis, four short projects for blogs and local newspapers, and nearly two dozen focus/response papers and other short assignments. He provided me with papers from his anthropology, political science, biological sciences, geography, and graduate writing classes.

I also read writing center observation reports if and when the students worked with writing tutors. Participating in writing tutoring was not a requirement for participation in the study, however. Although I was interested in how participants used the writing center, I was far more interested in the resources that they chose for themselves so that I could see the full range of resources they chose to employ as they developed as writers and scholars.

After the data collection was complete, the interviews were transcribed, read repeatedly and analyzed to understand the resources the writers used to support their writing development. I coded the data for both institutional resources like the writing center and graduate writing classes as well as personal resources such

as developing a network of proofreaders. Bishop (1999), among others, argues that the validity of qualitative results is strengthened through data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation, or in other words, by collecting multiple types of data from multiple sources and by multiple means. This study used three groups of “investigators,” these being myself, the writing center staff, and the student writers’ teachers, as well as multiple types of data. However, I was the only person who coded the data.

I chose to focus on Chozin in this chapter because he was enrolled in an interdisciplinary master’s program in Southeast Asian Studies, and thus was being asked to write in anthropology, sociology, marine biology, political science, and geography courses, many of which were writing intensive. I look primarily at the first year of his program as that is when most of his writing for his courses occurred, thus when he was receiving the most feedback. Chozin completed his thesis quite quickly and with little problem by the middle of his second year.

I also focus on Chozin because he was such an unlikely success story. At the beginning of my study his English was very weak. He had one of the lowest proficiency levels I’d encountered in over five years of tutoring our campus’s multilingual graduate students.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I knew some of his fall quarter professors, and I knew how much writing they required of their students. Having tutored a number of students in the Southeast Asian Studies program, my initial assessment was that Chozin wouldn’t be able to complete it. I was very happy to be proven wrong when he graduated on time, having presented at international conferences and having been awarded his department’s outstanding thesis prize.

## INTRODUCING CHOZIN

Chozin’s undergraduate degree was from a Bahasa-medium institution in Indonesia where he had studied marine biology. He had just arrived at our university from coordinating tsunami relief work near Aceh, Indonesia, and had contacted me via email after learning about my study during international student orientation and from the international student association. We arranged an initial meeting so that Chozin could learn more about the requirements of the study and so that I could assess his suitability as a participant. After Chozin had formally enrolled in the study, we began meeting every week or two. From the beginning, Chozin was friendly and easy to talk with. He was quite willing to share his own struggles and as his language proficiency grew, so did his willingness to talk. In our early interviews, I would struggle to understand him, and we would spend a fair amount of time negotiating meaning and clarifying

what he had to say. By the end of the study, he required very little prompting from me in order to talk for long stretches about his writing and research. Chozin seemed to develop a reflective habit of mind over the course of his graduate career, and as that habit of reflection developed, he became more and more willing to share what he was learning about himself as a writer.

In our initial interview, Chozin reported that he had struggled through his undergraduate work, that he had not graduated on time, and that he had often been behind on his work. He was now entering a master's program "centered on interdisciplinary curricula that combine the traditional foundations in the social sciences and humanities, components within the natural sciences, and the professions" (Center for International Studies, para. 1). In this program, students take a standard core of courses which are themselves interdisciplinary (educational research, geography, anthropology), and they then have wide latitude to specialize in a particular aspect of Southeast Asian culture; Chozin chose to specialize in maritime studies.

Given Chozin's undergraduate struggles, he was now entering a challenging master's program that would require him to take courses in multiple disciplines, to engage in regular field research and intensive writing, and to do all of this in a second language, without having had prior writing instruction in English, Javanese, or Bahasa. In their examination of the roles of writing in international academic contexts, Russell and Foster (2002) note that the "ubiquitous tradition [of first-year composition] in the United States—perhaps the only common denominator in what is otherwise a sprawling and diverse higher education system—strikes many teachers in other nations as strange" (p. 7). Russell and Foster remind us that Chozin's lack of writing instruction before entering the US academy is more likely to be the rule than the exception among multilingual writers, making their task of succeeding in the academy—and doing so at the graduate level—even more difficult.<sup>2</sup>

Chozin readily acknowledged that he struggled with writing. His other English language skills were weak as well, and these weaknesses were highlighted by the nature of research in his program. Over the course of his first year, Chozin's assorted writing projects required him to interview farmers at the local farmers' market, Caucasian American-born Muslims, a Southeast Asian, a person who had given him a gift, university food service personnel, and Indonesian blast fishers. Each of these interviews constituted the primary source for different writing projects and formed the bulk of the content for his respective papers. The necessity of conducting all these interviews to complete so many different papers made his language difficulties all the more obvious. It also meant that he struggled with the entire writing process, not just with composing, but also with comprehending the input needed to produce even a rough draft.

When I first asked Chozin to describe his writing ability, he identified organization and length of composing time as his primary difficulties: “I have problem with writing to arrange the uh, paragraph. Uh, yeah. It’s maybe for my friend, when we have assignment two page, she already just need one hours but for me, need four hours to do that.”<sup>3</sup> Chozin’s experience is consistent with research in second language studies that has shown that multilingual writers need more time to compose (Silva, 1993, pp. 661-662). In addition to struggling to understand the language input of his interviewees, Chozin did indeed have problems with organization, as my own assessment of his work confirmed, along with development and with integrating secondary sources. Chozin did make marked improvement in composing fluency and in writing style over the course of his program. He was less successful at improving his organization, development, and source use and, in fact, never gave any indication that he recognized these problems. Rather, he focused on increasing his fluency and building his vocabulary and on developing strategies to manage other problems that he encountered during his program. I will return to Chozin and the strategies he developed to succeed below; first, however, it is important to introduce another research informant, Chozin’s recruiter, teacher, and advisor, Dr. G.

## INTRODUCING DR. G.

Chozin’s story would be incomplete without including Dr. G., a faculty member in his program. Dr. G. was interested in writing studies and had become a convert to writing-to-learn theory through a series of WAC workshops. The WAC program at this institution was fairly new and was growing quickly at that time. John Bean’s (2001) *Engaging Ideas*, particularly his extensive use of writing-to-learn activities, had been a focal point in the WAC program’s faculty development seminars.

Chozin took one course with Dr. G. each quarter of his first year, and each of those courses utilized writing-to-learn activities extensively, typically in the form of weekly “focus papers.” These were 1-2 page response papers that sometimes became dialogue journals as described by Carter and Gradin (2001). The papers did not have specific prompts; instead the topics were student-driven based on their reaction to the readings. In some cases the papers were simply submitted as response papers. At other times students would be asked to trade papers during class and engage in written dialogue about the ideas in the paper. The papers were treated as informal writing projects, with comments focused on students’ ideas and grades based on engagement.

Dr. G. therefore provided me with vital insight into Chozin's development as a student and a writer. As Chozin's advisor, he was also a key player in that development since Chozin's thesis was an extension of Dr. G.'s research. Chozin had actually been directly recruited by Dr. G. while Dr. G. was doing field research in Indonesia. Dr. G.'s insight was also important because he was the only one of Chozin's professors who agreed to be interviewed.<sup>4</sup> Chozin was clearly fond of Dr. G. and respected him. He had formed this relationship before even arriving at the university, and he continued to cultivate it throughout his program and beyond. I return now to the strategies Chozin developed as he made his way through his master's program.

## **DEVELOPING STRATEGIES TO SUCCEED**

During his first year Chozin developed a number of strategies to manage the writing process and to improve his writing. Throughout this section I contextualize Chozin's strategic moves within the categories described by Leki (1995). Chozin never mentioned engaging in some of the strategies Leki identifies and he complicates others, as I discuss below. Chozin also developed several other strategies not mentioned by Leki's participants, as I noted earlier, including seeking feedback, developing a personalized course, and managing the data collection process. I begin by discussing Chozin's strategy for seeking feedback.

### **A NETWORK OF EDITORS**

Chozin sought feedback throughout his program from teachers, professional editors, and from a carefully developed network of peers that I term his "editor-friends." Initially these friends were other Indonesians, but after his first quarter Chozin began seeking out native-English-speaking (NES) students in his courses and asking them for help. He preferred to work with NES students who were also studying Bahasa, thus enabling him to "trade" writing tutoring for language tutoring. Being able to provide help in return seemed to make Chozin feel better about asking for assistance and thus allowed him to develop a more equitable relationship with his editor-friends.

It was obvious from our conversations that these editor-friends provided Chozin with a measure of moral support, but I found no evidence that they helped him engage in the kind of substantive revision that, based on my own assessment, his papers needed. When I compared first drafts, edited drafts, and final drafts, only sentence-level changes and corrections were evident yet there were often significant problems with development and organization. In some



cases I could not identify a purpose and, in several others, basic requirements of a genre were missing (e.g. a conclusion), a problem two of his teachers noted in their final paper comments. It is possible that Chozin was unable or unwilling to enact more substantive revision based on conversations with his editor-friends, but their written comments were focused almost exclusively on sentence-level issues, not on development, organization, genre, or other global issues. To Chozin, though, these corrections were apparently adequate, even though professors continued to lower his grades because of his writing. He often identified NES students in his classes who were also studying Javanese and asked them to read his writing. Chozin identified these students and then sought to “trade” writing tutoring for language tutoring.

Finally, although I (and, one might argue, Chozin’s professors) found the feedback provided by Chozin’s editor-friends to be lacking, Chozin *was* proactively seeking writing support. From his first quarter of graduate school, Chozin developed the valuable habit of seeking out feedback on his work. During his program he also transitioned to working with more professionalized “editor-friends.” Chozin began working regularly with his graduate writing teacher in spring quarter of his first year, which proved much more successful, as I discuss below. He also began working with a semi-professional editor in the community who had been recommended by a professor. It’s difficult to imagine that Chozin received no benefit from so much editing and so many conversations about his writing, even if we can also imagine how he could have benefited more from a reader who challenged him to improve his organization, develop his ideas, and use secondary sources more effectively.

## DEVELOPING A PERSONALIZED COURSE

Chozin developed a number of new strategies in winter quarter, beginning by enrolling in a graduate writing course to “accommodate his professor,” a strategy described in Leki’s (1995) taxonomy. During fall quarter, Dr. G. deemed Chozin’s writing so poor that he told Chozin to enroll in a graduate writing class for winter quarter. In my meeting with Dr. G., he had noted that Chozin had significant problems with organization and described his English skills as “among the worst” he had ever seen in the program. He described Chozin as being “in that category that I kind of dread because they know enough English to pass the test,<sup>5</sup> but not enough to write a clear paper by himself.”

Chozin took Dr. G.’s advice this time, enrolling in the second of a sequence of three cross-disciplinary graduate writing courses that were designed for international multilingual writers and which were taught by faculty from the TESOL program. The courses were Introduction to Graduate Writing,

Advanced Graduate Writing, and Thesis/Dissertation Writing. Although the courses were designed as a sequence, there were no prerequisites; therefore, students could take any course at any point. During the winter quarter, Chozin took the middle course, Advanced Graduate Writing. In this course students completed a variety of summaries and critiques that were sometimes based on texts he was reading in his disciplinary classes.

Chozin seemed to benefit minimally from this course, however. He received little positive feedback from his teacher, and the feedback he did receive seemed overly critical.<sup>6</sup> She identified problems like “lang. is non-idiomatic” and “sentence structure” but rarely offered Chozin alternative language. Her final comments on his first paper, a critique of two articles, identified problems but did not seem to offer any particularly constructive comments towards revision or future writing projects. She wrote:

You are clearly confused in this assignment. 1) The outline is wrong. 2) Discussion of comparison/contrast between the articles is too short. 3) There is no evaluation/response part that conveys your opinion (or position) in response to the articles summarized.

Throughout the quarter her comments suggested that he did not understand the assignments he was given. He never mentioned any specific benefits from the class and also seemed slightly frustrated that the course did not include “grammar instruction,” something that he believed he needed. Chozin was most enthusiastic about the class when discussing the individual conferences he’d had with his teacher. After one conference, Chozin said, “She give me comments and she give me, like, tips or strategies how to write it, how to compose the paragraph, how to arrange the whole writing with some paragraphs. She give me a lot of lessons.” When Chozin took the graduate writing course a second time, as I describe in the next paragraph, his teacher worked with him to create a more individualized experience.

In the spring term Chozin attempted to sign up for the third writing class, Thesis/Dissertation Writing, so that he could work on his thesis proposal; however the course was full. Instead, he registered for Advanced Graduate Writing again, but this time with a different teacher. At the teacher’s suggestion, he worked with her to develop what was essentially a personalized syllabus so that he could still benefit from repeating the class.<sup>7</sup> The spring course primarily consisted of one-on-one tutoring with the instructor as Chozin wrote his thesis proposal. (This iteration of the course is similar to the graduate writing seminar described by Fredericksen & Mangelsdorf [this volume], which

requires students to create individual learning contracts based on writing tasks assigned in other coursework.) He was able to develop a positive relationship with this new teacher and found this course much more beneficial. In a sense, Chozin added his graduate writing teacher to his network of editor-friends. She provided frequent proofreading and feedback as Chozin wrote his thesis proposal during spring quarter. Yet again, Chozin had taken a writing struggle and developed a strategy to succeed.

## FINDING THE RIGHT COLLABORATORS FOR GROUP PROJECTS

One of the greatest challenges Chozin faced during his program was devising a strategy for completing group projects. On the surface, Chozin had been quite successful in his first quarter and had earned strong grades. But it turned out that Chozin had—involuntarily—played a *very* minimal role in writing a group paper that comprised a large portion of the grade in his geography class. Chozin's group experience in this class was a major site of frustration for him. I quote extensively from our conversation here so that readers can see Chozin's own description of the group project and then compare it to his description of a group project in a later course.<sup>8</sup> When asked about the outcome of his geography paper, Chozin reported:

C: In the geography class, actually, I have paper, but it's not individual paper. We make, like, report for my project for people in my group, and actually, I didn't—I didn't write much because all my group know that I'm not English speaking, so they write. I do the reading, I do some research with them, and they write a lot of the report .... So the report is not mine, actually; it's not my writing. [It's] my friends' [members of the group] writing.

Talinn (T): So did you feel ... like, did it bother you at all that everybody else did the writing for that project?

C: Uh, actually, just once doing the writing. I mean, I send just my conclusion—my report and then give it to another and she write it for to be combined and edited ....

T: Were you happy with how you did with that class?

C: In the group? In the group I feel like I didn't enjoy in the

group. In the class I enjoy, but in the group I didn't enjoy because, uh, because everybody is, um, native speaker but I am in the group. I am limited in my language and everybody talking ... I am just quiet in my group. And I just waiting. One day they give me "You—you do this one" and I do in my home and then give it to him. But the group—they make a decision about my work. Yeah. They do more work than me, actually, but actually, I need to do more but I cannot do that because I have limited language to communicate with them. And also the study, the report area, is Cincinnati. I don't know about the area at all, so I just follow my group. They decided everything [because I didn't know anything about the Cincinnati area].

T: So would you have rather done something—written your own paper?

C: Yeah, yeah. Because if I had my own paper I can, I mean, I can express my—my opinion in my paper and then I also can, uh, get advice from other people. I can consult my paper to others, but in the group—in the group I have problem with my speaking, my expression. And maybe, yeah, because I'm not native speaking, so some of my group think that you are not expert in this area so they do everything. They help me a lot so that I can't do everything. Because they do everything in the group, so I don't feel involved.

T: So did they do everything because they didn't think you could do the work, or because you didn't think you could do the work?

C [forcefully]: I can work.

T: So maybe they didn't really give you a chance to do the work?

C: Yeah.

T: They just kind of decided, "We'll give him something that's easy"?

C: Yeah, because when they have meeting, I have to contact it. When they have meeting, I want to come.

T: So they weren't contacting you about the meetings?

C: Yeah the one. Once they had announcement the meeting and then they never send me email again, so I always contact them, "When we meeting?" and "When can I do the meeting? And what can I do? What my role in this group?"

T: Wow.

C: Yeah I just follow their order.

Many of us have watched or been part of groups where one student was clearly taking advantage of the rest of the group, but Chozin's group seems, at some point in the project, to have chosen to exclude one of its members. As the only multilingual writer and the only person who knew nothing about the city of Cincinnati, Chozin was at a double disadvantage before this project ever started and, presumably, his group thought he had nothing to contribute to their success. Although they probably knew relatively little about environmental hazards, they were "authorities," to some degree, on Cincinnati—at least when compared with Chozin. He had no other source of authority to counterbalance whatever knowledge they had of Cincinnati and their belief that his poor English skills were a liability. Thus, instead of including him in the project, they chose to exclude him.

This kind of exclusion is certainly not unheard of among multilingual writers. Leki (2001) reports on the negative "collaborative" experiences of Ling and Yang. Ling's group was dominated by two other members and thus Ling "was not allowed to bring in her particular expertise; nor was she able to benefit from the expertise of the [native-English-speaking] group members" (p. 55). Yang had a much better personal relationship with her group members, but her weak oral skills in English still meant that she "was also constructed as something of a burden or a problem to be fixed" (p. 55). Yang, who seemed to be reduced to the role of holding up posters and introducing group members, says "My job just—a lot of job is done by my classmate—easy .... The other conversation job was done by my classmates .... But I do best I can" (Leki, 2001, p. 55). Cox (2010) reports a similar case with Min. Though not described as being actively excluded by her peers, those peers do not seek out Min's obvious expertise either. Further, Cox reports that while other students saw themselves

as learning from each other, Min “did not seem to be part of this network” (p. 86).

Whereas Yang, in Leki’s (2001) study, seems to blame herself for her weak speaking skills, and Min, in Cox’s (2010) study, seems unaware of (or at least unconcerned with) her exclusion, Chozin was both conscious of his exclusion and upset with his group members as a result. When winter quarter began, Chozin discovered that he was again required to participate in a group paper. Not surprisingly, he was concerned that he might be excluded from another group; however, when I checked in with him several weeks into the quarter, he gave me a glowing report of his successful strategy. I turn again to an excerpt from the interview to let Chozin explain in his own words.

Chozin [excitedly]: Very different from group last term—was bad experience. I learning from this experience so this term I tried to make new strategy—trying to make it better. [My partner] become my best friend, I think, and she understands me .... When we become closer we can, like, make joking each other. That’s a good thing with learning English so it means that I can catch up some expression in English. She’s an undergraduate, not a graduate because there were only two graduate students in the class. I was the only international student in class, so I’m the only one who has problems with language. My writing, my language, but I’m trying to get better. I try to speak. I don’t care whether they understand my language or not. When the teacher asked us to work in pairs to do research, my research was at the farmers market. I think, “If I don’t initiate the research topic, I won’t have a group because no one will ask me.” So my strategy was, “I have idea so I have to speak to some of my classmates, and anyone who wants to follow my topic, then he or she will be my partner.”

I initiate I will do the Farmers Market because I know some people there and I have some data already. One of my friends wants to join me. It was good experience because we worked, like, equally. Even if I have limit with my language—with my writing—but she understand me and so she always give me chance to work. I work like my idea, like, I decide which one I have to interview and then she follow me. And after I writing, she read it and she edit it so it’s like, we

work equally. We always go together to interview. Before interview I always write my question and give it to her. If I have problem with my language when I ask question, she will understand my objective, what I want to say; she can explain. It's very helpful.

I was impressed when Chozin told me about this project. He really seemed to have taken responsibility for his own learning and had shown great resourcefulness. In contrast to Leki's informant Yang, who sadly reported, "Just hate myself, I can't get good English" (2001, p. 57), Chozin says, "I don't care whether they [my group members] understand my language or not"; he is determined to press ahead with his learning. When he entered the class, he recognized that there could easily be a repeat of last term's problems if he weren't proactive. In a class where there was only one other graduate student and no other multilingual writers, Chozin knew he was positioned to be excluded from another group project. But he also recognized that his past research could work to his advantage if he developed a topic quickly and presented potential partners with a fully formed idea, thereby saving them the bother of coming up with one on their own. Chozin successfully thought of a topic for the paper—one that he had already studied during fall. His prior experience gave him added marketability to potential partners.

Choosing the topic—one that he was familiar with and interested in—also gave Chozin a level of control and authority that was never possible in his other group when they were asked to write about the culturally-bound topic of environmental hazards in Cincinnati, Ohio—an area completely unfamiliar to Chozin. However, in winter quarter, Chozin was able to barter his initiative in choosing a topic and his prior research on the farmers' market when finding a partner. He was then able to use that authority to balance his lack of authority as an English speaker. This created a much more equitable dynamic in Chozin's group and a better learning environment for him. Developing strategies to find the right collaborators was a highly effective move on Chozin's part. Not only did he feel better about himself after participating in the second group, but this time he actually got some practice with writing, a feature missing from his earlier experience.

Here, Chozin seems to be complicating the categories Leki (1995) developed—or perhaps introducing a new one. She reports that her participants "rel[ie]d on past writing experiences" and "us[ed] current experience or feedback to adjust strategies" (p. 248). For example, she writes that her participant Tula "had done a great deal of essay exam writing in Finland and so felt relatively unconcerned about the demands of essay writing here" (p. 248). Tula had been successful in the past and used that experience as a roadmap for current writing

projects. Likewise, Leki writes that her participants used current feedback on early assignments to shape their future work. I would argue that Chozin is doing something a bit different when he strategizes to write a successful group paper: He is learning from failure. While Leki implies that Tula relied on past successful writing experiences, Chozin wasn't able to do that. Instead, he took a moment of failure, analyzed the decisions that led to it, and mapped out a plan to avoid that same failure again.

## MANAGING DATA COLLECTION

During winter quarter Chozin also developed a new strategy for managing the data collection process. Not only did Chozin's weak English skills mean that some of his classmates didn't trust him, but they also meant that he struggled in interview situations. He recognized that his English was sometimes difficult to understand, so he developed additional strategies to bridge the gap.

Chozin: When I went to interview I always ask my American friends to accompany. So because the problem is, when I interview by myself, sometimes—sometimes I'm asking that something that he already answered. Because I interview Ed and he was talking a lot, a lot, and talking much, and—a lot of information. And I hearing, hearing and then when he finish the talking, I asking [the same] questions again. But [the interview failed because I [already] asking [him that] thing. If [I] interview students, it's easy for me to understand because they're speaking, maybe, formally [at the university], but people on the street are using slang or maybe something they understand. Also I have strategy to always bring my recorder.

Once again, Chozin had learned from failure. He had actually devised a number of strategies to help him bridge from his current listening and speaking abilities to the point of writing a successful paper built on primary sources. He drafted his interview questions beforehand and asked a native-English speaker to check them to ensure clarity. He then interviewed his participants in tandem with a native-English speaker so that his partner could clarify, either for Chozin or for the interviewee. Finally, he recorded all of the interviews to further improve his comprehension. In order to do all this, Chozin had to demonstrate a remarkable amount of planning and coordination—and all this was just to gather the primary sources for his papers.



## TAKING A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO LITERACY

Throughout the first year of his program, Chozin had been working to improve his writing by tackling specific problems. He sought feedback on most papers, he accommodated his professor by taking graduate writing classes and worked to make those courses useful for him, and he learned from failure by developing strategies to manage group writing projects as well as writing projects that required him to engage in oral interviews for source material. Though I had observed Chozin developing these strategies to address specific challenges, in the spring of his first year it became clear that Chozin was also taking a broader, holistic approach to improve his writing. He had been developing several tactics to improve his vocabulary, fluency, and style and had begun engaging in a number of additional literacy tasks in English like journaling, online chatting, and extra-curricular reading. Reporting on his progress, Chozin said:

Yeah, I feel I start to get my writing style I think, because when I writing I feel like “Oh, I have to use this word. I have to exchange this sentence with this sentence.” So I think I’ve increased my capability with writing because I feel my style now. Before that I never feel it, just write, write, and write .... I used to write poems, so when I write, like, essay I’m not feel good in essay. Because when I read, like, three or four paragraph I feel tired, exhausted even though I still have many ideas—even in Indonesian, so I tend to write poems to express my mind. But I cannot do this in English because I cannot write poetry in English. I just use words to represent the ideas so I try more to write easy in English by writing my diary in English. I try to send email to my friend in Indonesia in English. I try to doing chat [rooms] in English. I think it useful for me to improve my writing and in English.

Chozin then continued to list his tactics to improve:

And I took graduate writing class, and I read more because, yeah, I know—I know—I believe as more I read, as more I get new words, so it will enrich my words to use in writing and so I read more. I read more magazine, more books, and yeah, it’s also very helpful.

By this point in his first year, Chozin seemed to be demonstrating recognition that all of his discreet literacy activities were interrelated and mutually supportive. He didn't view his personal writing or even his writing in Javanese and Bahasa as separate from his academic writing in English, and he didn't view vocabulary development as divorced from his speaking fluency. Instead, he recognized that all of his language experiences—in Javanese, Bahasa, and English—and all of their component parts—reading, writing, speaking, listening—were vitally connected to one another. He understood that to improve one part affects all of the others, improving the whole. In consequence, this final strategy might be termed “taking a holistic approach” or “understanding the relationships between the parts and the whole.” (In all of these respects, Chozin might be said to be demonstrating the kind of adaptive transfer—and agency—that DePalma & Ringer [this volume] describe.)

## REALIZING THE INVESTMENT

At the end of his first year Chozin's writing remained quite weak in many ways, but it was improving noticeably and he was increasingly proactive in addressing those weaknesses. His writing had actually appeared to get worse instead of better during winter quarter. He had continued to rely on friends to provide him with editing, but his winter paper load was high and his editor-friends were very busy, so they were less able to help him. As a result, Chozin paired high levels of sentence-level errors with a lack of understanding of basic academic genres; he continued to leave out sections that his professors expected him to include like conclusions, evaluations, and responses. He received writing feedback that was almost exclusively negative and his grades suffered. It appeared as though he were stagnating or even sliding backwards. Chozin seemed to be in the middle of a “u-shaped learning curve,” a common feature of writing development in which the cognitive overload of learning so much new material results in temporary setbacks in areas that writers seemed to have already mastered (Feldman & Benjamin, 2004; Perrault, 2011). Feldman and Benjamin (2004) argue that these “essential backward movements ... prepare the way for positive advances” (p. 98).

This backward action to pave the way forward is exactly what Chozin seemed to be experiencing in winter quarter. He had been busy developing strategies that would bring significant rewards during the rest of his program and the tremendous number of writing-to-learn assignments Dr. G. asked him to complete had begun to pay off. It wasn't obvious at the time, but Chozin was beginning to make large strides in fluency and composing speed. At the end of

his first year, he described the impact of his strategies and the last six months of intensive writing in various courses.

This is my last focus paper and, yeah, once a week, two pages is not hard anymore. It's like before that it's hard for me to write it, but now it's—I don't have any problem to write two pages every week. I get—I get used to write it.

A few weeks earlier he had been caught off-guard by the due date of a focus paper assignment. He surprised himself by successfully writing the paper in the hour before class began. And by the end of Chozin's two-year program, he had successfully defended both his thesis proposal and his thesis ahead of most of his classmates.

The case of Chozin therefore stands in contrast to some of the more recent research on multilingual writers and WAC, which has suggested that multilingual writers may receive little benefit or even be harmed by WAC pedagogies that encourage the intensive use of writing in courses, particularly if that writing does not have some relevancy to the writer's future field (Leki, 2003b) or if that writing occurs in the form of high-stakes assessment (Cox, 2011). In Cox's (2011) recent review article, she argues that "literature emerging from second language writing studies ... reveals WAC as a program that can close doors for L2 students" if teachers are encouraged to assign more writing without also being offered professional development to help them work effectively with multilingual writers (para. 1). Leki (2003a) goes so far as to ask, "Is writing overrated?" (p. 315). In critiquing Sternglass's study on the benefits of writing for students, Leki writes, "My L2 students found their writing requirements occasionally satisfying and sometimes frustrating, but most often they regarded writing assignments as necessary evils they would have preferred to avoid" (p. 317).

In remarkable contrast, Chozin neither complained about nor reported feeling disadvantaged by the heavy writing requirements in his courses. On the contrary, those assignments provided Chozin with a vivid indicator of how much his writing fluency had increased.

## CONCLUSION

After examining Chozin's thesis and other writing projects from late in his master's program, I still placed him in the bottom half to one-third of graduate writers I had worked with as a tutor. Yet he managed to be highly successful

as a graduate student and much of that success was signified by some kind of writing achievement. As I mentioned earlier, his conference papers were solicited for journals, he received grants to support his research, and his thesis won the department's award and was later published. At the end of Chozin's first year, Dr. G. said, "I think he's done really well. He's not fluent, but he's come a long way. As far as his academic work, he's doing fine."

Ultimately, I concluded that Chozin's success did not really hinge on his writing ability. It seemed much more connected to his resourcefulness, leadership, and to his knowledge of his field. Further, Chozin also drew upon his lived experience as a Southeast Asian, doing so explicitly in several classes and again in his thesis; he was no doubt a stronger student as a result. Particularly when compared to a monolingual Caucasian American who entered graduate school immediately after completing an undergraduate degree, Chozin had some marked advantages in his program.

Yet his lived experience was certainly not the only resource that Chozin brought to his graduate work. Interviews gave repeated indications that Chozin's research area was of great interest to his colleagues. It was also clear that Chozin was a leader in his class and had deep knowledge of his field. The best conclusion I could reach when trying to reconcile the mismatch between his writing ability and achievements was that people valued Chozin's other abilities and his research so highly that they were willing to overlook Chozin's writing challenges.

Chozin brought valuable experience to his graduate program and those experiences encouraged his success, but he then also developed many new resources to solve writing problems. He thus offers an example of a successful multilingual student who developed as both a professional and as a writer. The strategies that he developed were all quite personal, yet most have broad applicability. Using Chozin's choices as examples, teachers of multilingual writers might recommend that their students map out concrete plans for how they will manage an interview, or consider how they can position themselves as valued members of a group project. As teachers, we might even explicitly build such moments of planning into our courses in order to encourage a deeper learning experience.

Further, Chozin's strategy of learning from failure offers discouraged writers a means of productive response. Chozin struggled with writing throughout his graduate career. Instead of simply being discouraged or defined by his failures, however, he seemed to focus on the path that led to the problems he experienced and tried to identify ways that he could shift that path the next time.

Chozin's experience also highlights the importance, at least for some writers, of feedback and human connection through the sometimes difficult process of

composing. Chozin deeply wanted to be in relationship with others and to talk about his writing. In consequence, he carefully cultivated relationships with his classmates, with his teachers, with other Indonesian students, and even with me. Chozin's story reiterates the value of creating multiple feedback opportunities for our students. Although Chozin was clearly quite motivated to seek feedback, Dr. G. was deeply tied to many of the feedback experiences Chozin had.

Finally, Chozin offers other students a rich example of a writer who seemed to understand that all of his languages and literacies were parts of the same whole and that the time spent engaging in each literacy act had positive implications in a range of other contexts. Instead of compartmentalizing his English academic literacy away from the other aspects of his life and from his home language, Chozin recognized that his personal and professional literacies were intertwined and worked to improve both. Chozin was an unlikely success story and that makes what he accomplished all the more impressive and potentially encouraging to other struggling multilingual writers. His case study offers us yet another model for considering the complex, integrated process by which second language graduate students acquire the competence to write successfully in their chosen fields.

## NOTES

1. My work with graduate students as a writing tutor was one of my motivations for the project, but I was not a tutor during the study. During the second year of the study I was the interim Writing Center Coordinator but I did not tutor or respond to the writers' papers. I did provide moral support and at times offered very general advice as a peer, such as recommending a meeting with a professor or a session with a writing tutor.
2. See Zawacki et al. (2007) for additional stories of non-native-speakers' (lack of) writing instruction in their home languages and the challenges they faced in understanding American academic genres.
3. These were direct quotes from oral interviews and therefore are full of the pause fillers, false starts, and repetitions that are part of oral speech. Reporting oral speech verbatim often makes the speaker sound inarticulate at best, but I wanted to preserve Chozin's real speech at this point in his language learning and felt that editing out the "ums" and "uhs" would create an inaccurate representation. Preserving his actual speech also makes his gains in vocabulary and fluency all the more evident as his story progresses.
4. Chozin's other professors did not explicitly decline to be interviewed; they simply did not respond to repeated email requests to discuss Chozin's work.

5. Dr. G. is referring to meeting the qualifications for admission, not to any particular assessment tool.
6. Chozin's teacher did not respond to requests for an interview.
7. Because Chozin's second teacher also did not respond to requests for an interview, it was unclear whether Chozin was unique in being offered this "personalized course" or whether this was common practice. However, I do know from other students that the third writing class focuses exclusively on drafting and revising a thesis/dissertation; significant portions of class time are devoted to writing and conferencing with the teacher. Chozin's report of his modified "advanced course" seemed comparable to reports of the content in the Thesis/Dissertation course.
8. Readers may note several moments in this excerpt where I seem to ask Chozin very leading questions. During this conversation I was following Chozin's tone and nonverbal cues in addition to his speech; both suggested that there was a more serious problem than the spoken language of the transcript reveals. Specifically, I had the impression that Chozin was quite upset by what had happened in the group and yet that he was also trying to avoid disparaging other group members. Instead of trying to infer what had happened in the group, I chose to ask Chozin clarifying questions and give him the opportunity to correct my understanding of events. Instead, Chozin's words, tone, and nonverbal cues confirmed my preliminary understanding of what had happened.

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