

Assessing the Needs of Linguistically Diverse First-Year Students: Bringing Together and Telling Apart International ESL, Resident ESL and Monolingual Basic Writers

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As teachers and administrators of composition programs, we are all aware of the increasingly diverse body of students with varied profiles and different needs enrolling at universities across the United States. Some are international ESL students, who face the challenges of pursuing higher education in a second language. Others receive the label “basic writers” and, as other works show, struggle to reconcile their experience in college with their own cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds (Matsuda 68). Yet what teachers of writing have to address now goes beyond the relative heterogeneity of the international ESL population or the specific needs of monolingual basic writers; we increasingly work with and must take account of another group of linguistically diverse students—resident ESL students.

In other works, readers will find these students labeled as “Generation 1.5,” a term I chose not to adopt for several reasons. Generation 1.5 students are defined by Harklau, Siegal, and Losey as a group formed by “bilingual US resident students who enter US colleges and universities by way of K–12 schools” (1). Born to immigrant parents, who more often than not use a language other than English in the home, many such students are highly fluent and even native-like in oral English. They may be more acculturated than are internationally-based visa students—who have traditionally dominated the ESL student population—and consequently identify more with the United States than with any other nation.¹ Still, they may be faced with difficulties akin, in many respects, to those of international ESL students, making a complete separation of these two groups impossible—they naturally overlap. To complicate the matter further, some international ESL students (a synonym for “visa students”) also arrive at college after attending US sec-

ondary schools for a few years. While coining the term “generation 1.5” was helpful in calling attention to the difficulties a specific set of ESL writers, the distinction between resident ESL students and ESL internationals seems more appropriate, given the kind of comparative analysis that this article proposes and employs. Indeed, this paper often refers to the combination of international ESL and resident ESL as “linguistically diverse students,” a term suggested by Harklau, Siegal, and Losey (1–16).

It is important to draw a distinction between ESL writers and monolingual basic writers (i.e., native users of English regardless of their degree of proficiency in a foreign language). That is not to say that resident ESL and, to a lesser extent, ESL international students cannot be basic writers. In fact the two can coincide; while being ESL has to do with one’s relationship with the target language, being a basic writer has to do with state of academic development. In fact, these ESL students may also be basic writers in their native languages as well. Nevertheless, the needs of ESL basic writers often differ significantly from those of monolingual basic writers, hence making necessary the three-way distinction used here. If ESL students are at a basic level of writing, they need to receive instruction within an ESL context.

While many problems may affect the college experience of international ESL and monolingual basic writers, the situation of resident ESL writers is even more critical. The fact that resident ESL students do not fit neatly into the other two classifications may erode their placement in first-year composition classes, thus clouding their self-perception and ultimately impinging on their university success. Such domino effects further exacerbate the familiar challenges for international ESL and monolingual basic writers as well.² Linda Blanton (119–41) portrays quite a disturbing picture of the possible outcome of the academic endeavor undertaken by resident ESL students. She explains that “At worst, language minority students succeed academically but lose themselves, lose the struggle to hold on to their selves. [. . .] Or they think the price too high, and they abandon the struggle altogether, leaving academia embittered and defeated” (136).

With the writing discipline, the situation becomes all the more worrisome because, given budgetary constraints of composition programs (rather than pedagogical beliefs), many higher education institutions have had to “mainstream” all students, directing them to traditional composition classes. In such classes, linguistically diverse students (i.e., international ESL and resident ESL) often see educational practices falling short of addressing their individual needs; many times instructors of traditional composition classes simply do not have the training to teach any type of ESL student. As a result, the gap between expected outcomes and the actual performance of these students may continue to widen in a process that can ultimately pre-

vent these learners from achieving their full potential as educated persons and from discovering themselves as writers (i.e., their voice, interests, and inclinations).

Because of these perspectives and because of aspiring to reach program administrators and instructors who may face these challenges, this article synthesizes and expands the current understanding of the differences between (monolingual) basic, international ESL, and resident ESL writers. A proposition regarding reasonable ways of dealing with the reality of diverse college writers despite the bureaucratically imperative need to mainstream all students seems necessary. It is only when we, as scholars and teachers, cease to perceive the differences in profiles, needs, anxieties, and expectations of these students *as deficiencies* and begin actively to engage in educating all faculty that teaching to these differences has become a necessity will we start to serve this population well in spite of the many constraints encountered nationally by first-year composition programs.

In the following, the overriding characteristics of resident ESL writers are contrasted with the traits of international ESL students and monolingual basic writers. The emphasis in this article is often placed on resident ESL writers because they have been the most neglected population of the three groups (see Valdés, 85–193; for more on basic writers see Zamel; DiPardo). To understand the whole picture, it is necessary to analyze additional factors affecting linguistically diverse learners, for instance, those aspects relating to the professional qualifications of instructors, the learning environment, and the sociocultural milieu. We can then pursue suggestions for better serving a population of linguistically diverse students. The next few sections will show how intertwined and influential these aspects of a student's learning can be.

WHAT MAKES DIVERSE STUDENTS SO DIVERSE?

The diversity of writer profiles in college composition classes has already drawn the attention of several scholars who have established the challenges of dealing with minority groups that do not fit neatly into preestablished categories. Leki's *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers*, although not focused on resident ESL students, creates a comparative analysis of characteristics of ESL writers and monolingual basic writers, showing their profile distinctions and thus the differences in pedagogical treatment needed. Matsuda (67–89), in his historical account of basic and second language writers, discusses the difficulties of all-inclusive definitions and the changing profile of university writers. Thonus (17–24) addresses the important role of the writing center in serving linguistically diverse students, particularly resident ESL writers. Finally, Ferris (143–157) calls for a comparison of the needs and

characteristics of these three overlapping groups. These writers share a common concern for students' unique needs as a group of diverse learners as well as having great respect for their individuality. Although we often resort to grouping them together, it's a perennial truth that each of these students is a distinct human being with a singular history of life and learning.

In Table 1 below, Leki's contrastive examination of basic and international ESL writers has been complemented to include resident ESL writers.

Table 1.

The Distinguishing Characteristics of Three Populations of Writing Students: An Expanded Contrast of Basic, Resident, and International ESL Writers in 2005

Attributes	Monolingual Basic	Resident ESL	International ESL
Register	More comfortable with everyday language	More comfortable with everyday language	More comfortable with formal language
Strategies	Possibly lack study skills and writing strategies	Possibly lack study skills and writing strategies	Probably well trained in L1 writing strategies transferable to L2
Awareness of Linguistic Background	Possibly lack awareness of their own linguistic traditions	Possibly lack awareness of and have conflicting attitudes toward L1 and L2 cultural and linguistic traditions	More likely to be aware of and have respect for cultural and linguistic traditions of L1
Language Acquisition	Find themselves in the process of learning the specific uses of English	Find themselves in the process of acquiring the language	Find themselves in the process of acquiring the language <i>and</i> learning specific uses for it
Oral and Written Language	Often transfer the oral language into written form	May transfer oral language into written form, simultaneously incurring ESL errors	Often aware of differences between oral and written language, yet displaying ESL errors

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Level of Acculturation	Likely to present shared cultural assumptions with context (acculturated)	May be trying to be a part of the culture, yet are still presenting ambiguous and conflicting responses to acculturation	Are in the process of learning cultural integration and contrasts. May or may not want to acculturate
Educational History	May have been held back by the educational system	May have been held back by the educational system	Usually have been satisfactorily pre-tested and screened on multiple occasions
Attitudes—Placement	Averse to remedial placement	Averse to ESL placement	Accept ESL placement
Grammatical Knowledge	Possibly unfamiliar with parts of speech and grammar terminology	Possibly unfamiliar with parts of speech and grammar terminology	Possibly aware of grammar because of prior instruction
Attitudes—Errors	Are frustrated by errors that can be associated with “bad” English	May see errors as further disabling evidence of their non-mainstream status	Expect and understand that they are bound to make errors
Learning Style	Are primarily “ear learners”	Are primarily “ear learners”	Are primarily “systematic learners” (i.e., learn through reason)
Language and Emotions	Can rely on their oral skills to express frustration, needs, doubt or disagreement.	Can usually rely on their oral skills to express frustration, needs, doubt or disagreement.	Are often prevented from expressing their frustrations and needs because of their limited oral skills.

Note: The information for this table was drawn from the work of Leki; Blumenthal; Blanton; Harklau, Losey and Siegal; and Thonus; see Works Cited.

ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE AND GRAMMAR

While most international ESL students have learned L2 in formal settings and are thus more comfortable than other ESL learners with the differences between oral and written discourse *and* with the use of a more formal register in academic settings, most monolingual basic writers and resident ESL writers, as shown by Thonus (18) tend to be more comfortable with an oral and more informal mode of communication. Often resident ESL students “picked up” English by using it in daily tasks, listening to language use on television, and interacting with peers or coworkers. Their international counterparts, on the other hand, have usually been involved in language learning in formal classroom settings (Harklau, Siegal and Losey 2). It is not uncommon, then, to find resident ESL writers transferring oral patterns to their writing assignments in what can look and be understood by the instructor as an almost stream-of-consciousness draft. Many times, the result will be a seemingly underdeveloped paper in which the student employs few coherence devices and uses unrelated pieces of information at widely separated parts of the written work. What makes the situation more complex in the case of resident ESL students is the presence of the so-called ESL errors scattered across the text.

Whereas many instructors would immediately start editing these texts and requesting further drafts, it is not particularly clear that these students could transform their own writing without an overt acknowledgement of the cross-cultural rhetorical confusion that lies beneath their surface errors. Such complex difficulties in making indirect connections between the product and the underlying rhetorical structure should evidence the need for direct instruction about rhetorical conventions which can then be complemented by organization and grammar level corrections and changes.

However, resorting to grammatical categories and classifications can once more prove frustrating because these students are often unfamiliar with grammatical terms. While many international ESL students can, given their L1 and L2 instruction in their native countries, understand and appreciate the use of terms such as *conjunction, adverb, clause, and sentence fragment*, many resident ESL students cannot. As Ferris explains, “[M]ost discussions of teacher feedback strategies and accompanying teaching materials overlook immigrant ESL students’ lack of knowledge of formal grammar terminology” (146). Thus, this kind of instruction can not only be unsuccessful, it may further perpetuate in students the idea that their language is deficient and inappropriate, creating self-identity problems which further erode their confidence to do the language learning required of them.

Instructors can thus choose between two options, which have generated much debate in composition studies. They can either avoid the issue of grammar altogether—after all, unlike many international ESL students, resident ESL learners can often rely on their oral skills to express their needs and wants and to provide intuitive clues (Thonus 17–18)—or they can choose to pursue grammar studies, especially through a contextualized approach that will enable students to incorporate some language terminology into their vocabulary. Further help can come from a grammar of style, such as rhetorical grammar³.

Kolln explains that rhetorical grammar allows students to become aware of “this language ‘facility,’ this conscious ability to ‘select effective structures for a given rhetorical context’” (29). The advantage of using this method with students (and using other forms of contextualized teaching of grammar) is that it requires students to consider purpose and audience consistently when selecting any grammatical form. At the same time, it defuses the possible misconception, often perpetuated by high school education, of the existence of “prohibited” forms in a language (such as passive voice). Instead, rhetorical grammar replaces prescriptive ideas of what written discourse should look like with an emphasis on student effort to analyze their own choices. This process of discovery and conscious decision-making tends to be very fulfilling and liberating for students. In the specific case of ESL students, contextualization becomes a crucial aid to their increasing competences, one that can facilitate language acquisition and their written English.

ACCULTURATION, ATTITUDES, AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

Different degrees of and desire for acculturation characterize monolingual basic writers, resident ESL writers, and international ESL writers. While there are many shared assumptions between monolingual basic writers and the instructors who teach them, resident ESL and international students deal with quite different realities. Resident ESL individuals also have, in many respects, a desire for assimilation. If they came to this country on a permanent basis, they may wish to become a part of it, that is, to see and be seen by those around them as belonging. On the other hand, resident ESL students often face the same struggles of international ESL learners, and consequently both groups end up forming networks with other resident ESL individuals or with international students (Leki). ESL residents may feel ambivalent toward their linguistic and cultural heritage, especially when these aspects of their being are devalued or not recognized by L1 monolingual users. They may also be partially unaware of their linguistic, literary and cultural backgrounds (Leki), the very traditions that could give them a feeling of pride and satisfaction in being a part of their home language community.

At the other end of the spectrum, many international students are well versed in and display great reverence for their home country traditions. If they live temporarily in this country, they may feel more curious about its cultures than they are eager to gain membership in it. Despite often being engulfed by the traditional stages of culture shock, they usually leave this country with a feeling of better understanding and appreciation for the value of their own culture. At the same time, they tend to retain certain traits of the new culture that they found appealing and, conversely, become particularly critical of the ones they did not. Thus, although they may or may not be willing to assimilate, they use their experience both in this country and abroad as an aid to learning, a strategy not always available for monolingual basic writers and resident ESL writers.

Because resident ESL students want to see themselves as and, indeed, at least in terms of oral command, often are similar to native users of English, they may be averse to being placed in ESL composition courses (Blanton 123), and they may have good reason to feel that way. Given that they have progressed to a later stage in the process of acculturation (i.e., they dress like the locals, use current slang, respect cultural conventions such as the ones governing turn-taking and personal space), they do not require extensive instruction on culturally appropriate behaviors (Leki) of the sort that is an active component of many ESL curricula. To make matters worse, they may feel ashamed of their status vis-à-vis their peers who are native English users and reject any suggestion of cross-cultural difficulties.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Students within these three groups are at very different stages of language acquisition. Monolingual basic writers may be acquiring the dominant variety of a language they already possess. Nevertheless, an instructor can rely on these students' use of intuition and on their emphasis of thinking patterns that lead to more developed papers. They may need to expand their active vocabulary and to work on depth and presentation of evidence, but they have an intuitive knowledge of their mother tongue.

International ESL students, on the other hand, are acquiring the language and at the same time learning a particular academic use for it. Nevertheless, they may be very familiar with academic discourses and the differences between the particular setting of academia and other situations of communication. While it is usually a mistake for instructors to "simplify" their language in an attempt to become more intelligible for these students (these students probably have much more trouble with phrasal verbs such as *take after* and *run into* and idiomatic uses such as "You are pulling my leg" than they do with formal language), they may need to be openly taught that

rhetorical practices may change from language to language, even within more or less the same genre. It is not uncommon for international students to label rhetorical practices in English as “worse” or as less intuitive than the ones they bring with their native tongues. Overt criticism of rhetorical practices in English can in turn make composing in English all the more difficult as attitudes can play a big role in language acquisition performance.⁴

Resident ESL students may well stand anywhere between the other two groups. They might be acquiring the language and its various uses or be primarily involved in learning the ways of academe. Because their educational experience may be fragmented and not consolidated in either language, they often have little past experience to draw from.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

Sometimes the writing challenges that affect monolingual basic writers stem from problems beyond the writing arena. Some of these students display difficulties with strategizing their learning and coordinating their study practices. They may present maturing academic skills and often display a simplistic interpretation of complicated matters. They may have been pigeonholed as remedial students, which could further widen the gap between them and “traditional” college students.

Some resident ESL students may struggle with similar difficulties. As mentioned above, their previous learning experience may have been interrupted several times; they may have started in one language only to continue in another, and their experience may still have been permeated by very different educational philosophies which were never fully consolidated. They may display maturing academic skills, which are at times counterbalanced by good set of skills relating to their potentially bilingual experience and their memberships in different linguistic communities. To sum up, their academic experience may as well be very fragment which will impact the way they learn.

Many international ESL students are confronted with a challenge of a different nature. While they may display very mature academic skills (to have traveled to this country, most likely they have been screened and tested extensively for academic skills), they may suffer from the intense frustration of having “knowledge trapped inside” because that knowledge may be far beyond their linguistic ability to express it linguistically. They may agonize over their own attempt at engaging in a complex discussion, only to realize that their language development is still insufficient to help them achieve that goal. On the other hand, some are surprised to realize that their language abilities are better than they anticipated and indeed better than those of some native writers (e.g. basic writers).

ADDITIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE EXPERIENCE OF LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE STUDENTS

Several other factors compound the difficulties of these three types of L2 students. They involve, but are not limited to, the preparation of the instructors teaching first-year composition courses, instructional time, socio-economic status, and placement constraints. Some of these aspects are discussed below.

Who Teaches Them? Teaching students who come from different linguistic backgrounds requires specific skills and abilities, familiarity with features of other languages, and some knowledge of cross-cultural issues. What complicates the instruction of linguistically diverse writers is the fact that they are sometimes assigned to instructors with little or no preparation in these areas of expertise.⁵ Additionally, many composition programs rely heavily on graduate teaching assistants and adjunct faculty who are left out of important discussions regarding methodological practices. It is not that the instructors are unwilling but that they may not have the appropriate professional background. As Frodesen and Starna observe, “Typically, mainstream [composition] instructors are troubled by the uncertainty of how to best assist these L2 students in developing writing proficiency” (63). Great frustration on both parts usually results. The instructor, on the one hand, may return papers with a heavy load of corrections, most of which only scrapes the surface by attacking misspelled words, verb tenses and the like. The students, on the other hand, have a hard time converting these corrections into information to be used in subsequent papers, given that the corrections do not necessarily follow a pattern.

Even when classroom instruction is geared toward these students, the time allotted for them to become competent writers might be inadequate. Because groups typically meet for three or fewer hours a week, the struggling student may lack the necessary time to absorb and incorporate instructional materials. Some may also feel the need for more one-to-one attention than the instructor can afford. Still others may feel self-conscious about sharing their work with peers, an attitude which further isolates them and slows down the process of becoming effective writers.

Who Are They Outside of Class? When it comes to their reality outside the immediate classroom, resident ESL learners are arguably subject to more socioeconomic challenges than their international student counterparts. According to Judith Rodby (45–60), the financial situation of immigrant families is difficult more often than not, a fact that leads many students to take on heavy work loads outside campus. My experience with this population tells me that some work as many as forty hours a week, despite university guidelines that suggest a maximum of twenty hours for full-time stu-

dents. With fewer hours to study and more stress than is manageable during college years, resident ESL students feel the effect of their overloaded life reflected on their academic performance.

Community Misconceptions about ESL Students. International ESL learners have to deal with many preconceptions about their background and language ability: in extreme cases they stumble upon very patronizing attitudes in the community towards them, their linguistic skills and life back in their countries. Many international students will tell anecdotes about being talked to loudly, slowly, and with unnatural and excessive gestures; they will report being asked silly questions about their reality abroad (for example, “Do you have refrigerators in your country?”), getting explanations in overly simple terms even though the student understands the conversation (“Do you understand the word ‘avenue?’”), and so on. Despite being initially taken aback by such momentary lapses in judgment, most international students finally come to terms with these mishaps and store them as interesting episodes to retell back home. The situation may be a little different for resident ESL students, who have a vested interest in being considered a part of the community and who, as mentioned before, probably feel as much insiders as any native English user. Lack of sensitivity to and awareness of their circumstances can be disruptive to their social lives and to their academic progress.

Placement into Composition Classes? Finally, the issue of placement cannot be downplayed. According to Jessica Williams’s (157–79) survey of ESL writing program administration, ESL students can encounter a host of configurations under which ESL composition instruction takes place. From the beginning of these students’ college careers, such configurations range from non-credit ESL requirements prior to their taking regular composition courses to their inclusion in traditional composition classes. Having ESL writing instruction outside of the English department is also among the possibilities, as is a two-track composition program in which parallel composition courses are offered to native and nonnative English users.

Even two-track institutions have to decide whether resident and international ESL students belong to one or the other class configuration or whether they want to create an additional set-up, one that Silva, in “An Examination of Writing Program Administrators’ Options,” refers to as cross-cultural composition, “designed to include a more or less equal number of ESL and NES [native English speaking] writers” (40). Given the heterogeneity within the groups, adequate placement can be quite challenging. Too often students are placed not on the basis of their individual needs but according to how they fit predetermined standardized categories. Misplacement has caused many international ESL students who could be in regular classes to

be labeled as ESL, and it has been the catalyst to many resident ESL students who needed only specialized attention to fall through the cracks of the track to mainstream composition (Harklau, Siegal and Losey 8). The situation seems particularly critical in the case of resident ESL students. As Harklau, Siegal, and Losey put it: "In which program or configuration immigrant students are placed depends on how they are classified when they arrive in college out of U.S. high schools, and the way in which bilingualism is construed in any given institutional setting appears to be quite varied, if not idiosyncratic" (6). Such idiosyncrasies may further complicate the already delicate situation of many linguistically diverse students, and thus call for action on the part of instructors, researchers and administrators alike.

WHAT CAN BE DONE REALISTICALLY?

Given the challenges outlined above, it becomes necessary to find and strategize ways to address at least some of the needs of linguistically diverse sets of composition students. A great deal can be achieved if administrators and faculty work toward a paradigm shift, one in which diverse students are perceived as already engaged in multiple literacies and in which their needs are deemed different rather than greater or more challenging.⁶

WPAs need to commit to creating some revisions of programs and continuing education of the faculty: the suggestions contained here can be better communicated to faculty through a continuous process rather than through isolated (that is, instance-based) training, and any such process needs to include to a great extent a department's adjunct faculty and teaching assistants. Because several ideas relate to a change in beliefs and attitudes, they cannot be implemented overnight. Instead, ideas will consistently come with dialogue, negotiation, and even some cross-disciplinary training. For the latter, I recommend that both WPAs and faculty read and discuss works in sociolinguistics and particularly in world Englishes. When instructors become aware of the magnitude, the scope, and the many different functions of English around the world, their perceptions of the language tend to change completely, and their sensitivity to issues facing users of the language who are different from themselves seems to grow accordingly. Some classic works that can serve as a springboard to dialogue and professional development are Braj Kachru's *The Alchemy of English* and *The Other Tongue*, and Larry Smith and Michael Forman's *World Englishes 2000*.

Among the many other ways WPAs can help address students' needs is by providing opportunities for ongoing assessment. Frodesen and Sterna propose steps for continuous assessment and instruction of students after initial placement has been made. Those steps include (a) the gathering of student information through a needs analysis questionnaire that also includes

academic background information, (b) a coordination between mainstream and ESL instructors (as well as basic writing instructors) when two tracks are available, (c) **an invisible seam between ESL and traditional writing tracks to make possible transitions between them smooth,** (d) attention to course design so that course offerings will focus “on continuity of instruction, assessment and further placement,” and, finally, (e) support through tutorials (77).

Needs Analysis. Typically, a needs-analysis questionnaire directly and indirectly assesses the concerns and needs of students. The questionnaire may ask students directly about their past experience with multiple languages and writing, as well as what attitudes they have vis-à-vis formal instruction, grammar instruction, etc. Many other elements, such as stereotypical (and culturally assumed) perceptions of writers and writing and perceptions of the self as writer, can be inferred from their answers to the questions. One of the advantages of conducting needs analyses, besides the obvious tailoring of the course according to the needs of the students, is that the instructor can become aware of the challenges that the student associates with the English language as differing from those the student has also faced when writing in another language.⁷

Coordination between Mainstream and ESL programs. If these students will be using their writing in similar environments in the future (e.g., in their upper-division courses and jobs after graduation), they should be receiving equivalent instruction even if their more immediate needs are different. Therefore, the ESL track should not overlook the primary reasons students attend composition classes which include the need to communicate knowledge in the disciplines throughout their academic careers and beyond that in the job market.

Invisible Seam between Tracks. Some institutions do not allow students to take one composition course in the ESL track and another in the mainstream composition program. The rationale behind this policy is often that a better sense of continuity will be achieved if one remains in a single track. However, this prohibition has serious implications for students, especially if the number of ESL classes is limited. The risks and benefits of allowing students to move between the tracks based on performance and needs should be carefully weighed vis-à-vis the unique situation of each program.

Course Design. As with item (c) above, careful thought should be given to the fact that no composition class stands in isolation but exists only as a part of a larger whole, one that is populated by other instructors, students, and academic demands.

Tutorials. Whether in a school's writing center or through another configuration, individualized attention may be responsible for maintaining a student's status in the program, especially during times of student stress or heightened demands.

Because many composition programs do not offer multiple tracks, I offer some suggestions (one ideological, two structural, and three pedagogical) as extensions of the ideas of Frodesen and Starna: they are (f) the adoption of a more holistic approach to literacy, (g) synchronized coordinated work with the disciplines, (h) coordinated work with the writing center, (i) the teaming up of students who have different profiles, (j) the employment of different feedback practices, and (k) a systematic focus on rhetorical practices as opposed to the surface level of the language.

The Adoption of a Different Approach to Literacy. As pointed out throughout this article, each group of linguistically diverse students has a unique potential to develop literacy skills further and has the ability to communicate within academia. However, what was once thought of as "literacy" (i.e., the ability to read and write) is actually one among several forms of literacy that interact and intertwine with one another. In the spirit of fostering all forms of literacy, the instructor should take advantage of whatever the students already have as the foundational blocks on which they will ultimately construct a new whole. Nevertheless, too often we focus on what the student is lacking (e.g., appropriate and linear knowledge of writing conventions, grammar-related vocabulary, and a history of writing proficiency) as the starting point of teaching as opposed to starting from their present competencies (typically computer literacy, creativity, knowledge of the world, and work experience), accomplishments that will in due course provide the foundation for their developing writing ability. It is our job as instructors to change our own frame of mind to accept the realities of these students' lives, whatever they may be, and use them to their advantage. This central change will guide most of the decisions to be made from this point in pedagogical history onward.

Synchronized Work with the Disciplines. The Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement resulted from an acknowledgment of the role of teaching writing throughout all disciplines in the university setting (Maimon). Because writing-intensive classes are a reality in disciplines as diverse as corporate strategy and women's studies (each of which carries its own rhetorical conventions), each discipline's instructors have become involved in addressing writing concerns. Nevertheless, if instruction and feedback in the disciplines are not aligned with the practices of composition programs, the results can be more damaging than encouraging. Students who receive conflicting messages about their writing must ultimately decide

for themselves what they value in their writing. That is, of course, different from their acknowledging that in the spirit of addressing various audiences and purposes, a writer will make discipline-specific adaptations. Administratively, then, efforts should aim at ensuring the classroom use of language philosophies that are not conflicting; in the end, it is very hard to convince a student to work on invention when other instructors are arbitrarily proclaiming that they will “mark down any sentence that starts with ‘because,’ any construction that employs the passive voice, and any use of the weak ‘to be’” no matter what the rationale behind those choices might be. It is counterproductive if the composition professor says one thing and the instructors working in the academic disciplines say another. While comprehending readers’ individual preferences is yet another challenge that writing students must learn to deal with, a partnership with the disciplines can help ensure a more invisible seam between the writing that occurs in the composition classroom and writing elsewhere in academia. Team-teaching, WAC or WID (Writing in the Disciplines) programs, learning communities, and writing councils are only a few of the many formats that campus-wide writing initiatives can take. Once again, working with the disciplines means acknowledging that a multiplicity of literacies will be at work when students engage in writing outside of the composition classroom to satisfy other assignments.

The Writing Center at Center Stage. Much of the difficulty relating to serving students of varying profiles has to do with finding time to service individual needs. In the classroom, given its many curricular constraints, the instructor may find his or her time as restricted as their students do. Nevertheless, many institutions count on a learning or writing center that can partner with instructors to offer individualized attention to learners. What is more, because such centers provide the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with students, the tutors there can help dissipate problems before they overwhelm students who already have crowded lives. One such problem is the occurrence of plagiarism (Sterngold; Pecorari; Buranen), especially by at-risk students. The writing center is often the first place where a suspicion of plagiarism arises. Thus, the center can be an active aid the process of informing the students of the seriousness of such acts. At the same time, writing center tutors can help students build strong composition skills that might encourage them to rely on their own writing rather than on someone else’s. In the case of international, and, to some extent, resident ESL students, the writing center can also help educate learners about the importance of respecting intellectual property in the United States. It is not always the case that a student’s country of origin considers the misappropriation of intellectual assets as critical an issue as the misappropriation of material belongings. Certain students may feel that using someone else’s words is a demonstration

of their having done their research. Early attention and detection by the writing center can help students make sense of another area outside of rhetorical practices in which cultures can collide.

It is not only in the case of plagiarism that writing center personnel can be important allies. From providing a nonthreatening environment where reading and writing can be celebrated to offering the individual attention that many nontraditional students need, the writing or learning center can underscore for learners the importance of peer review and feedback, a practice that all scholars know should continue and develop throughout their academic career. Programs can consider an even more formal partnership between classroom instructors and writing center tutors, one in which a number of sessions and tasks have to be accomplished before student promotion may occur. It is then up to the specific programs, in light of their unique challenges, to find the right measure and extent of this important cooperation.⁸

The teaming-up of students. Realistically speaking, instructors might see themselves in a position where these three linguistically-diverse student types have been placed in the same class. Such a complex situation can be viewed by a pessimist as chaotic and unmanageable; after all, teachers are well aware, either intuitively or more formally, of the challenges of instructing heterogeneous groups. The realist, on the other hand, might see these unique but mixed groups as justification for trying out innovative practices and experimenting with different teaching modes. If instructors assume that each of these individuals has distinctive strengths to share with the other members of the class, then these teachers will not only make the most of learning but also empower the learners by making them sense that they are active participants in their group's learning process. The benefits of peer review, for example, are maximized if students who can offer different interpretations of texts can be paired with one another. For example, international ESL students can offer their accomplishments to basic writers by focusing on the development of a basic writer's work while trying to get the student to work on acquiring a level of formality. A basic writer, who has the colloquial skills in place, can focus on ESL interference in the writing of both international ESL learners and resident ESL learners. Finally, a resident ESL learner's unique ability to shift from one audience to another might help both monolingual basic writers and international ESL writers with matters of register and context of communication. The teaming of students who have varying profiles indicates that the instructor believes each student can contribute to developing the multiple literacies necessary for successful writing in academia.

Employing Differentiated Feedback Practices. Thonus (17–24) argues that international ESL writers and resident ESL students have various ways of processing feedback and, further, that a more direct approach usually works

better with resident ESL students than does the indirect feedback usually employed with international ESL writers. In that case, it appears that resident ESL learners benefit from advice when it is posed in the form of statements rather than from those “more polite” rhetorical questions (for example, “I believe you should restructure this paragraph,” instead of “Do you think you would want to restructure this paragraph?”), since statements can come across as directions for change rather than suggestions.

I consider that the quantity and quality of corrections and suggested changes are also crucial and can be complemented by specific tasks that are individualized to each learner’s needs. For example, I try to read each student’s essays, looking for a pattern that students can work on and apply in subsequent assignments. This pattern may have to do with voice in the case of one student, organization with a second, and subject-verb agreement with a third. I then provide specific directions about methods of working on the assigned task, explaining that I will be reading for it again when I get subsequent essays. I avoid overediting the surface level otherwise. This system has helped me the most in classrooms where a great variety of needs is represented among its students, allowing me to offer some personalized attention regardless that any challenges faced by one’s peers might be very different from one’s own. Ferris (143–57) suggests that pointing to patterns of error instead of pinpointing every instance of an error helps reduce the frequency of such patterns in further writings. Therefore, avoiding the correction of every single error in a text can benefit students academically while concurrently providing encouragement through selective editing practices. By doing this, once again the instructor acknowledges an individual’s skills and understands that given specific personal strengths, students need different feedback.

Shift in the Overall Focus from the Surface Level to Rhetorical Practices. The literature has often acknowledged that some major differences between basic and more mature writers are connected to their awareness of audience and purpose (Rosenwasser and Stephen). Nevertheless, many composition classroom practices still focus heavily on the correction of surface-level errors, with little or no effect on further occurrence of the same errors in later assignments. One reason for this practice’s lack of effectiveness has to do with the stage of development of a student’s linguistic abilities. An intermediate-level international ESL writer, for example, might not be mentally prepared to systematize an advanced grammatical rule or an idiomatic use of language, and if that’s so, then excessive corrections are likely to make him or her more self-conscious. By the same token, a basic writer might be unable to avoid all of the “there,” “their” and “they’re” confusion, if he or she is still heavily reliant on oral language as a source for writing. It is then the instructor’s role to know when addressing surface errors is helpful and when

the students might be better served thorough instruction on the other levels of writing (e.g., organization, thinking patterns, and rhetorical moves that better address considerations of audience and purpose). It is also noteworthy that work on these areas can finally revert to the surface (e.g., students who understand that the audience of an essay is an academic readership may decide to avoid slang as a basic decision), preventing certain surface level errors to occur altogether.

CONCLUSION

The challenges facing first-year students and their instructors are many. The more multicultural the university classroom becomes, the more interesting and complex the teaching gets. The teaching experience is always multifaceted with linguistically diverse students, and yet almost everything about a student can make him or her unique and diverse (gender, age, race, ethnicity, linguistic history, etc). Bringing together the three groups of diverse learners—international ESL writers, monolingual basic writers, and, in particular, resident ESL writers—is certainly a more methodological maneuver than it is a manifestation of their homogeneity, given that great diversity, as well as overlap, is found within and between the groups. However, acknowledging the differences between international ESL writers, monolingual basic writers, and resident ESL writers is also a departure from a dichotomist treatment of learners as necessarily and exclusively either native or nonnative. Additionally, being able to tell the groups apart helps instructors realize that writing instruction must be customized. A call for customization of composition instruction should at the very least bring awareness to multifaceted college composition and to the potential for each student to become a competent writer.

It is to be hoped that teaching methods and techniques will continue to advance toward serving different learner profiles. If that is the case, the grim picture of challenges faced by linguistically diverse students will exist only as a line in an academic paper. Ultimately, serving linguistically diverse students in an academic environment begins and ends with accepting all forms of language as classroom assets rather than thinking of these language forms as if they were liabilities.

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NOTES

1 For a discussion of the shift in L2 populations in US universities, see Matsuda, 67–89.

2 See Valdés for an extensive discussion on challenges.

3 Refer to Kolln and Carl Smith for both sides of whether or not to teach grammar explicitly.

4 See Friedrich for a discussion of attitudes and their role in language learning and use.

5 See Silva, “An Examination,” for issues of teacher preparation.

6 See Gee for extensive work on literacies.

7 For further information on needs analysis, refer to Ferris and Hedgcock who extensively present suggestions for analyzing the needs of students and for designing ESL programs.

8 For further discussion of the role of writing center in bridging the disciplinary gap, see Phillips, Stewart, and Stewart in this issue of WPA.

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