

*Paul Kei Matsuda always wanted to become a teacher. In elementary school, he wanted to become an elementary school teacher and, in junior high school, a junior high school teacher. At the age of 17, when he realized that the best learning strategy was to teach himself, he became his own first student, teaching himself English primarily through reading and writing. He has been teaching ever since, while continuing to teach himself how to teach.*

## Epilogue

### Reinventing Giants

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*We are like dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants; thus we are able to see more and farther than they can, not because we have keener eyesight, or stand taller, but because we are raised and lifted aloft on their gigantic greatness.—Bernard of Chartres*

### These Are the Stories of Giants in the Making

The *teaching* of writing to non-native speakers of English had already become a serious concern at some institutions of U.S. higher education by the early 1960s (Matsuda, 1999, 2001), but the *field* of second language writing took longer to develop. That is, even though, from the 1960s on, second language writing courses were being taught (particularly in ESL contexts), textbooks were being written, and teachers and researchers were making conference presentations on topics related to the field, the idea of second language writing as a field with its own disciplinary infrastructure and a shared sense of identity did not come into prominence until the

1990s. The birth of the field, at least in my mind, is marked most conspicuously by the publication of Barbara Kroll's landmark collection, *Second Language Writing: Research Insights for the Classroom* (1990) and the creation, in 1992, of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, edited by Ilona Leki and Tony Silva. Prominent in these and other important publications in the field are the names of many of the giants represented in the present collection.

Giants they are indeed. The authors whose tales are told in this volume have had many years of experience as teachers of ESL writing. Some, in fact, have been teaching for as long as I have lived, if not longer. As I was developing my own expertise as a teacher and scholar of second language writing, I read and learned from many of their works, hoping to build on their collective wisdom in my own work. As teacher educators, they have nurtured generations of ESL writing teachers, some of whom have gone on to become teacher educators themselves. Many of them have also mentored budding scholars who themselves are now seeking to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the field. I, too, received my professional preparation under the superb guidance of one whose tale appears in this book. I have also gained much from the informal and often indirect mentorship of others represented here.

As these stories attest, however, their narrators have not always been the giants they are today. Believe it or not, they were once young and inexperienced teachers; and many of them became teachers of ESL writing quite by accident. They, too, struggled with issues of authority, or the lack thereof, in the classroom. When they walked into the ESL writing classroom for the first time, they probably were as nervous as any brand-new teacher. A number of them started teaching ESL writing when few ESL writing textbooks were available. And when handed a textbook to use, some of them tried, as many novice teachers would, to teach the textbook faithfully, only to realize later that teaching "by the book" does not always

yield the desired outcome because contexts of instruction often vary beyond what textbooks are designed to accommodate. Furthermore, they realized that early textbooks were not necessarily informed by adequate theories of writing. Faced with a lack of workable alternatives, some of the giants developed their own textbooks, many of which are still being widely used today.

In the absence of well-developed theories of writing in TESL/TEFL, a number of them turned to first language composition studies and even received formal professional preparation in composition theories and pedagogies; however, they also came to realize that pedagogies and materials developed with only monolingual native-English-speaking (NES) writers in mind do not always work for second language writers, who come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and whose learning goals are not necessarily the same as those of their NES peers. When they figured out that neither composition studies nor TESL alone could provide the kinds of insight necessary to inform their work, they began to create their own discourse community. Thus, the field of second language writing was born.

All of the giants whose voices we hear in this volume have traveled far in search of better pedagogies and, in time, better theories. Some of them sought the shoulders of their own giants to perch on, such as those of Robert Kaplan or Clifford Prator. They followed fads and fashions in pedagogical approaches and strategies, adopted new innovations with enthusiasm, were disillusioned by their limitations, and then moved on to other, “new and improved” pedagogies. As Dana Ferris notes in the introduction to this collection, Tony Silva aptly characterizes this development as the “merry-go-round of approaches” that generated “more heat than light” (Silva, 1990, p. 18). Eventually, they came to recognize the complexity of second language writing and writing instruction and began to develop a more critical and reflective attitude toward their own teaching practices. They also realized the

need to develop more theoretically grounded approaches and materials and sought to better understand the nature of second language writing, writers, and writing instruction by engaging in research efforts and theoretical discussions.

Thanks to the hard work of these giants (and others), we now have a wide array of professional resources to draw on. We have numerous textbooks to choose from, representing various pedagogical approaches and covering a wide range of proficiency levels and student needs. Opportunities for professional preparation in the teaching of second language writing have expanded considerably during the last decade or so, with an increasing number of master's programs now offering courses in the teaching of second language writing. And we also have doctoral programs where graduate students can work under the guidance of some of the second language writing specialists represented in this volume, including Alister Cumming at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, Tony Silva at Purdue University, and myself at the University of New Hampshire. Finally, we have professional books for second language writing teachers and researchers widely available, and books of this sort continue to proliferate (e.g., Carson & Leki, 1993; Ferris & Hedgcock, 1998; Kroll, 1990; Leki, 1992; Reid, 1993; Silva, Brice, & Reichelt, 1999; Silva & Matsuda, 2001a, 2001b, and see the Michigan Series on Teaching Multilingual Writers, series editors Diane Belcher and Jun Liu). We, the newer generations of second language writing teachers and scholars, now stand firmly on the shoulders of giants—or so it may seem.

### **This Is Not, However, the Story of Dwarfs Perched on Their Shoulders**

When I was asked to write this epilogue, my initial impulse was to use the metaphor of dwarfs (“we”) perched on the shoulders of giants (“them”). After all, they are the people

who created the field in which I work. Yet, while there is no question about their being giants, the image of dwarfs standing on their shoulders doesn't work too well. It is not just because, at least physically, I, for one, stand taller and probably have better eyesight than they. Rather, it has to do with the particular way newcomers continue to enter the profession, as well as the way all teachers develop knowledge.

While second language writing has come to be recognized by many as a field of specialization, especially at the college level, it has not been—and perhaps it will never be—institutionalized as a popular career path in the way that some people may think of a future in teaching in general. It is almost inconceivable that children would dream of becoming ESL *writing* teachers the way they dream of becoming perhaps some other kind of teacher. While some future ESL writing teachers may be introduced to the field by working in writing centers that serve a diverse population or even by taking ESL writing courses themselves, they are probably not the norm. Many still “stumble” into ESL writing, just as many of the giants did.

In fact, new teachers continue to find themselves teaching ESL writing unexpectedly, struggling with issues similar to those faced by the giants. I am no exception. I began my “career” as an ESL writing teacher also by happenstance during my first year of undergraduate studies in Wisconsin. As a favor to some friends who were also ESL writers, I provided tutoring services, going over their papers, pointing out grammar errors and various other “problems.” I sometimes gave them minilectures on grammar, usage, thesis statements, topic sentences, organization, and other topics that interested me at any given moment. I also spent several summers tutoring English to high-school and college students in Japan. As I developed my pedagogy, I drew on my own experience as an ESL writer, as well as on examples set by my teachers—both ESL teachers and non-ESL writing teachers. It was not

until some years later (in my senior year in college) that I received some formal preparation as a writing tutor at the university writing center.

As a writing tutor who lacked a broad understanding of various theoretical perspectives in the field, I was susceptible to the kinds of pendulum swings that some of these giants describe. There were times when I focused almost exclusively on the issues of grammar and style; then there were times when I went to the other extreme, refusing to comment on grammar issues at all. After taking a business writing class, I started emphasizing the use of short sentences and active voice, condemning the kind of academic prose that I now read and write daily (with a great sense of pleasure and excitement, I might add). There also was a time when I was excited about identifying linguistic and cultural rhetorical patterns in the texts of my tutees. At one point, I was so disgusted by the overemphasis on grammar in some ESL writing classrooms that I was opposed to teaching English “as a second language” altogether. However, as I gained more experience tutoring both native and non-native English speakers at the writing center, I began to realize that strategies developed to help native English speakers—such as asking questions or having students read their own texts aloud to identify grammar errors—didn’t always work well with second language writers.

As was the case with many of the giants, I started reading the professional literature on second language writing on my own. (At this point, I was working toward my master’s degree in composition and rhetoric at Miami University of Ohio; see Matsuda, *in press*.) Reading the literature on second language writing was necessary for me because, to do a good job as a writing tutor, I felt the need to understand more about second language writers and writing instruction, even though I was not being introduced to such literature in my master’s program. (It was concerned primarily with NES writers.) Ulti-

mately, as a result of my self-directed study—and especially after taking a graduate seminar in second language writing taught by Tony Silva during the first year of my doctoral studies at Purdue—I felt fairly well versed and prepared by the time I started teaching ESL writing in a classroom setting. I had all the theoretical and pedagogical resources I needed at my disposal; in addition, I had the benefit of being mentored by one of the giants.

Having professional preparation, resources, and mentoring were certainly helpful. For instance, I did know—both from my own experience as an ESL student and from working with Tony—not to “teach the textbook” but rather to use textbooks as resources. I also knew that it wasn’t the end of the world when my written feedback to students was not reflected in their second drafts or when students didn’t seem to be using peer workshops productively. Yet, for the most part, I credit my years of experience as an ESL writing tutor and ESL writer myself as having laid the groundwork that allowed me to gain as much from the professional preparation as I did.

I don’t mean to suggest that I didn’t benefit from the professional preparation I received. I do believe, as Barbara Kroll suggests in her tale, that new generations of second language writing teachers should take advantage of available professional preparation opportunities and resources in order to guide and even accelerate their development as teachers. However, no amount of professional preparation or resources will help new teachers see farther than the giants can see today unless new teachers themselves are willing to struggle with various issues and develop their own personal knowledge base, situated as it is in the context of their own teaching.

And walk in our own shoes we must. Even when we trace the paths created by these giants—seeing the same scenery they saw and making some of the same wrong turns they made—we will have to discover for ourselves what we know

and where we are going. We will eventually reach some of the same conclusions: that teaching is a complex business, that we need to be critical and reflective, that we will continue to face the same challenges that we faced when we began, and that we nevertheless have to continue to walk forward as these giants so clearly have done. And we will see that we have to create this knowledge for ourselves. It cannot simply be handed down to us. When we come to these realizations, we will have reinvented ourselves as giants. And we will see farther and know more because we are seeing through the eyes of giants, not from their shoulders. The nature of *becoming* is that, in part, we also must start from scratch, although we have the tales of the giants to guide us in the process.

We must all become giants ourselves. Each of us.

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