

Dana Ferris, who was not even born when some of the veteran contributors to this collection began their teaching careers, is nonetheless considerably older than Paul Kei Matsuda, the other “junior” contributor, who wrote the epilogue. Starstruck while attending the 1996 TESOL colloquium, which initiated the work leading to this collection, Dana has since moved on to the more mature stage of simple respect and admiration.

Introduction

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Beware of “complacency that puts our critical faculties to sleep.”—Ilona Leki

Ask students what they want, think, and need.—Joy Reid

A “questionable practice”: Error correction and identification.

—Alister Cumming

“The five-paragraph essay: Tool, or torpedo?”—Ann M. Johns

I had “a tendency to overload students.”—Melinda Erickson

We need to “value qualitative research.”

—Linda Lonon Blanton

“I can’t believe I did that!”—Barbara Kroll

How a “New Kid on the Block” Ended Up in This Book

These wonderful “sound bites,” and other provocative quotations and ideas, were swirling through my head as I left the 1996 TESOL colloquium on writing that gave rise to this collection. Like any veteran conference-goer, I have experienced papers and panels that have been good, bad, and indifferent. Over the years, I have arrived at the view that if at a professional conference I hear just one really memorable

paper or colloquium panel, a presentation that stimulates or challenges my thinking or teaching, the trip is a success. I left that Chicago colloquium, orchestrated by Barbara Kroll, with a sigh of satisfaction, knowing that my modest hopes had once again been fulfilled and that the money spent, the time away (I missed my younger daughter's second birthday), and the frozen toes and fingertips (a lifelong Californian, I have limited tolerance for a Chicago winter) had been justified.

That spring semester I was teaching a graduate seminar on teaching ESL writing in the master's program in TESOL at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). I knew my students would be eager to hear, firsthand, accounts of the veteran writing teachers and researchers whose names they had encountered in their course readings. With this in mind, I took copious notes at the colloquium, which I typed up when I got home and turned into material for my closing lecture of the course. (I also had the effrontery to throw in a few thoughts of my own.)

I called this lecture "Insights from the Leading Lights" and have since used a version of it every year. Students love it, and it always gets me an enthusiastic round of applause as I release them into the world with the final exhortation: "Go and be wonderful writing teachers." As an extrovert, of course, I thrive on this sort of affirmation, so I have been grateful to Kroll and Company ever since.

Because of my personal history with this particular panel, I was delighted when I heard about plans to turn the conference presentations into a book, and I was honored by the invitation to write the introduction to the collection. What strikes me now in reading the various contributions is the collective sense of history they convey—the history of second language teaching in general; the somewhat haphazard way in which ESL writing instruction, in particular, has evolved over the past 40 years; and especially the trends and pendulum swings that have come, gone, and come again. As Linda Lonon

Blanton and Barbara Kroll note in their preface, I am of a different generation of writing teachers from the authors whose stories appear in this volume and yet a bit further along in life and teaching than Paul Kei Matsuda, who has written the epilogue. Being in the “middle generation” of this historical progression—not among the pioneers but not among the most newly minted, either—gives me a somewhat unique vantage point. I would like to use this opportunity in the introduction to tell a bit of my own story and how the voices in this collection have influenced it and to briefly spotlight each of the various tales.

Where My Story Fits In

I entered the ESL world in 1983, at age 23, a new bride with a bachelor’s degree in English (literature and creative writing) who aspired to an academic career. So I entered the brand-new master’s program in TESOL at California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) (little knowing that I would, a mere seven years later, be back teaching in the same program). Even as late as the early 1980s, it was somewhat unusual to pursue TESOL training at all, and especially *before* teaching abroad, rather than afterward. I remember being quite intimidated, in my first graduate seminar, by the fact that I was almost the only student in the class with no teaching experience whatsoever. When I completed my degree in 1985, I was surprised (but pleased) to discover that teachers with degrees in TESOL were such a rare commodity that I actually had my pick of teaching jobs, despite my lack of experience. (All right, they were part-time, temporary, low-paying jobs, but still . . .)

I fell into the teaching of ESL writing as a specialty quite naturally and quite early in this process. During my first semester at CSUS, I took an internship course in which I did one-on-one tutoring in the campus writing center. Because I

was in the TESOL program, the staff in the writing center was thrilled, ecstatic even, to fill my tutoring schedule with ESL students. None of the other tutors there had a clue about what to do with them. (Neither did I, actually, but at least I was learning.)

The students I worked with were mostly recent immigrants or international students from the Middle East, the Pacific Rim, and Southeast Asia. I discovered several things that semester: (1) I loved ESL students and found them fascinating; (2) I loved everything about the teaching of writing; and (3) despite my bachelor's degree with honors in English from the University of California, Davis, I knew almost nothing about writing or even about the English language. Thankfully, the professor who taught the internship course, Charles Moore (now Emeritus), was a superb teacher educator, who also had a lot of interest in and sympathy for ESL writers. I learned a lot from him about writing and about teaching.

Acting rapidly on these insights about my interests and recognizing my deficiencies, I enrolled the following semester in a class entitled "Teaching Composition in College" and another one called "Traditional Grammar and Standard Usage." In addition, I kept teaching ESL students, now in the Learning Skills Center, where I was hired as a graduate assistant (again, the only one with any TESOL training at all) to teach small-group tutorials in reading and writing. By my second year in the program, I was a teaching assistant and had my own three-unit ESL composition class to teach. By the time I completed the program, I had (for the times) an impressive record of tutoring and teaching and some very relevant and helpful coursework under my belt. The following year, I taught ESL writing courses at CSUS and at a local community college.

This resume then enabled me to qualify for a teaching assistantship at the American Language Institute (ALI) at the University of Southern California (USC), where I enrolled in

1986 to pursue a doctorate in applied linguistics (and where I was fortunate enough, like several of the other contributors to this collection, to work under the guidance of Robert Kaplan). By 1990, I was back at CSUS, teaching in the MA/ TESOL program, where I am now a full professor and where I coordinate the ESL writing program for the English department. I have continued to pursue my interest in the teaching of writing through teaching ESL writing courses; regularly teaching a graduate seminar on the topic; supervising our ESL writing practicum course; conducting classroom research; and writing articles, books, and teacher-preparation materials drawn from my findings and from my own teaching experiences.

At the time I began my training and teaching career, the process approach to composition teaching had firmly taken hold in both first and second language composition circles. My graduate coursework related to writing was all heavily influenced by the then-current scholarly work of Vivian Zamel and Stephen Krashen (Krashen, 1982, 1984; Zamel, 1982, 1983, 1985). Both at CSUS and at the ALI at USC, it was a given that students should write multiple drafts of their papers, that feedback on content and form should be given at separate stages of the writing process, that grammar issues should be de-emphasized and perhaps skipped altogether, that students should collaborate in peer-feedback sessions, and that one-to-one teacher-student writing conferences were critical.

I loved teaching writing at USC. Most of the classes I was assigned were filled with fascinating international graduate students, and I enjoyed being able to just talk with them about their ideas and not worry about their language problems. After all, the most admired scholars in the field and the professors who had trained me assured me that it was not necessary *or* effective to focus on such issues. I distinctly remember marveling that I actually got paid for having such a good time.

But then the seed of doubt that this was really all there was to it was planted in me by USC professor David Eskey, in a course on teaching ESL reading and writing. Eskey's early musings on the process approach's effects on ESL writers had been captured in a brief *TESOL Quarterly* think piece, amusingly titled "Meanwhile, Back in the Real World . . ." (Eskey, 1983). In class, Eskey skillfully led us through a then-current debate among Daniel Horowitz, JoAnne Liebman-Kleine, and Liz Hamp-Lyons (Horowitz, Liebman-Kleine, & Hamp-Lyons, 1986), opening my eyes to an ESL composition world in which process really was not the only active paradigm. As I continued teaching, I became increasingly and uncomfortably aware that my students' writing problems, whether to do with form, content, or rhetoric, did not magically disappear simply because they were engaged in the writing process and given individual freedom and minimal teacher appropriation.

When I later began teaching ESL writing at CSUS, I immediately encountered the very real-world problems and challenges faced by students there. As I helplessly watched some of my own students fail the course exit exam and/or the university's writing proficiency exam (required for graduation), I began searching the literature and examining my own pedagogy for answers about how to better prepare them for the very real writing obstacles they faced. This quest was made all the more urgent by the fact that not only was I teaching my own ESL writing students but I was now training future generations of ESL writing teachers. Would I pass on and inculcate sound pedagogy and practical strategies? Or would I provide them only with vague platitudes and wishful thinking, along the lines of "Clap your hands and Tinkerbell will live again"?

As I read, thought, reflected, experimented, and researched, I became convinced of several things, but most importantly that over the history of L2 writing, every carousel horse on the "merry-go-round of approaches" (Silva, 1990, p. 18) has represented a different piece of the answer and that

there is a place and context for almost every paradigm and technique.

Controlled composition? Not “real writing,” of course—some would label it “writing without composing” (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996)—but potentially valuable at the beginning stages of academic writing instruction for text modeling and practice for students who are not yet fluent enough in English to produce original discourse.

Current-traditional methods? Subject to much rigidity and abuse—and subject to the worst risk, that students will be bored to death with tasks like “Write a process paragraph on how to brew a pot of coffee”—but maybe, just maybe, even a current-traditional approach carries with it some helpful tools within the notions of “thesis,” “topic sentence,” and “transition” that might assist emerging intermediate writers in ordering their thoughts more effectively. (Even the “five-paragraph essay”—is it a “tool or a torpedo,” as Ann M. Johns asked in the colloquium? Well, it depends.) As several of the authors in this collection eloquently express, rigidity in embracing a particular paradigm and rejecting out of hand all elements of others may cause us to ignore who our students are and what they will do after we are done teaching them and to neglect good ideas that may very well be exactly what they need.

The Storytellers and Their Influence on My Own Story

The teacher-scholars whose stories and work are chronicled in this collection have been key figures in my own quest for answers over the past decade. Barbara Kroll’s (1990) edited volume, *Second Language Writing*, was the textbook I adopted, along with Joy Reid’s hot-off-the-press *Teaching ESL Writing* (1993), when I offered my first teacher-training course in ESL composition in the spring of 1993. (Ilona Leki’s marvelous *Understanding ESL Writers*, 1992, was already in use in

an internship course at CSUS, so that wasn't a possibility.) Articles and book chapters subsequently published by Johns, Kroll, Leki, Reid, and Silva have also been influential in my primary and secondary research work, my teacher-preparation courses, and my own ESL composition teaching. (I am certain that several CSUS generations of MA/TESOL students consider all five individuals as personal friends, because they have read so much of their work and heard so much about them.)

Similarly, I have become professionally acquainted over the years with Linda Lonon Blanton, Alister Cumming, and Melinda Erickson and have also found them to be wise, insightful, thoughtful, and encouraging. Every single one has been incredibly generous in their support of and interest in me as a younger, less experienced scholar in the emerging area of ESL writing. It is no wonder that I was thrilled to hear seven of them in one morning in Chicago. (The day before, I had also heard a wonderful paper by Tony Silva titled "On the Ethical Treatment of ESL Writers," later published in the *TESOL Quarterly* [Silva, 1997].)

All of the contributors to this collection (except for Paul Kei Matsuda and me, who were added as voices from "younger generations") have now taught ESL writing for 20-plus years. Here, they tell their stories in their own voices of how they came to teaching and to second language writing and of what insights they have gathered from their years of experience. The segments have in common that each is a story about more or less the same historical period. (For example, three of the authors describe using the same composition textbook in the early 1970s.) What is unique about each is the array of themes and reflections that emerge as individual narrators retrace their own footsteps.

While each story stands alone, it is also interesting to trace the connecting threads. The first three narrators, Barbara Kroll, Melinda Erickson, and Ilona Leki, detail some errors and excesses in their own careers, now seen in hind-

sight. Leki, Tony Silva, Joy Reid, and Ann M. Johns, though in different ways, all talk about the importance of analyzing text, context, and students themselves. In the final two tales, Alister Cumming and Linda Lonon Blanton offer critical analyses of L2 teaching and research paradigms and make recommendations and suggestions about what to avoid and how to engage in future discipline building.

An Introduction to Each ESL Composition Tale

Barbara Kroll frames her story as advice for future teachers of L2 writing. Building on her own experiences, she highlights what she specifically sees as useful: “expect the unexpected” and develop coping strategies, have confidence in the authority ascribed to you as the teacher, reflect on what you have done after the class is over, and so on. As a teacher educator, I appreciate Barbara’s careful drawing out of transferable principles and strategies to help novice writing instructors learn from her experiences and even from her mistakes.

Melinda Erickson talks about “pendulum swings” that she succumbed to over time, always with the very “best of intentions.” For instance, she “swung” from a tendency to overload students to a hands-off, minimalist approach. Melinda offers her experiences as “a cautionary tale” to help teachers feel better fortified to resist their own pendulum swings because of faith in their beliefs and practices. Her discussion is reminiscent of Tony Silva’s (1990) description of the history of L2 writing as characterized by a “merry-go-round of approaches” that has “generated more heat than light” (18). And it reminds me of my own growing awareness that there is likely truth and value and something students need in every instructional paradigm that has ever taken root.

Next comes Ilona Leki’s tale. For me, Ilona is a model of

someone who is constantly growing and discovering new things in the field; her blend of intellectual curiosity and obvious passion for discovering what is most helpful to students challenges and inspires me.

What I appreciate most about Ilona's story in this collection is the humility it embodies and calls all of us to embrace. While, like some of the other narrators, Ilona describes teaching practices that she now characterizes as excesses or mistakes, she concludes by warning us never to think that "now we know." Instead, she challenges us to constantly stay aware of research and current thinking, listen to what students tell us, listen to our own intuitions, and reflect on our teaching. Listening to her presentation in Chicago and reading her tale, I was struck by the insight that neglecting to consider any one of these three components—research, students, and our own intuitions—will put us out of balance as teachers. This is a principle I have communicated repeatedly to my own graduate students ever since.

Tony Silva was not a participant in the Chicago colloquium, but his contribution certainly belongs in this collection. His efforts, along with those of Ilona Leki, in instituting the *Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW)*, more than any other single achievement, established second language writing as a legitimate and important area of inquiry. Tony's own writing, dating back to the 1980s, has also been influential in advocating the uniqueness of second language writers and their ethical treatment (e.g., Silva, 1988, 1993, 1997). He also urges us to bridge the gaps between scholarship in second language writing and first language composition studies and between L2 writing and other applied linguistics subfields.

Researchers and writers in L2 composition who have benefited over the past decade from Tony's annotated bibliographies in *JSLW* (produced along with a series of graduate students, who have themselves gone on to become impressive scholars) will not be surprised to read in Tony's chapter

about his devotion to spending time in the library to educate himself about L2 writing issues. The man reads everything. Also noteworthy in Tony's chapter is his extended discussion of how he has learned to always adjust his pedagogical choices to the context and needs of each new group of students, rather than relying on a textbook or assuming that we have somehow cracked the code on how to teach L2 writing and no longer have to read, reflect, or get to know our particular students.

Joy Reid's tale, which details how she has learned over her teaching career to "ask" students what they want and need, thus connects nicely with Ilona's reminder to listen to students and Tony's emphasis on adjusting our teaching strategies to each new classroom context. Though Joy is an accomplished scholar whose work has had tremendous influence on L2 writing, she is first and foremost a teacher who evidences a love for and fascination with students. She said in her 1996 conference talk that "teaching never gets boring." When you read her story, you recognize the truth of her claim. She is a teacher who is also a learner, who has deliberately put herself in the position of being instructed and informed by students. Joy's work on learning styles is another variation on the "ask" theme: Find out who the students are and how they best learn and, as a teacher, make adjustments accordingly. As a writing teacher, I am stimulated by this advice, and yet I struggle to apply it. (It is hard to let go of the notion that at least in some areas, I really do know better than my students.) Early on in my life as a parent, I read the advice to "become a student of your child." What Joy advocates in this chapter is that teachers "become students of their students."

The next narrator, Ann M. Johns, shares with Joy and Tony a passion for identifying and addressing the real-world needs of ESL writing students. I have special appreciation for Ann because, like Barbara Kroll and me, she is a faculty member in the California State University (CSU) system, a world in

which teaching and administrative loads are heavy and support and rewards for research are minimal (some would say nonexistent). Despite this, she has a long and distinguished record as an incisive thinker and a superb scholar and writer. It is no exaggeration to say that when I was a new CSU professor, I literally thought: “If Ann Johns can teach in the CSU system and still be an active scholar, so can I.”

In her chapter, Ann chronicles not only her evolution as a teacher but specifically why she “became an advocate for approaching writing through genre.” Like all of her work, Ann’s discussion of genre and ESL writing instruction is both methodically grounded in theory and scholarship *and* intensely practical in its view that writing instruction based on genre analysis is truly what is best for students facing the demands of academia and professional life.

Alister Cumming, also a pioneer in L2 writing, has made important contributions through research, mentoring of graduate students, and editorial work, especially his tenure as editor of the distinguished journal *Language Learning*. Based on the knowledge derived from scholarly endeavors and his own teaching experience, Alister identifies in his story six “principles” that he believes are valuable for the teaching of ESL writing and six “practices” that he has engaged in at various points in his career but that he now finds questionable.

To me a conference paper or a piece of writing is successful if it forces me to think critically about what is being said and if I even find myself arguing in my mind with the speaker or author. As Ilona Leki says, we are far from knowing it all about second language writing (and indeed, we probably never can or will know it all), and anything that causes us to question our own assumptions and practices has intrinsic merit. When I listened to Alister’s paper in Chicago, I struggled and silently argued with several things he said. For example, I wondered why he was so negative on the issue of error correction.

In fact, Alister was editor of *Language Learning* when Truscott's (1996) controversial review essay advocating the abolishment of error correction in L2 writing classes appeared. Both Alister's conference paper and Truscott's article led to my own renewed interest in the topic and resulted in a lot of research and writing activity in that area over the subsequent years—my own and that of others (see, e.g., Ferris, 1999). As I said, provocative statements are indeed valuable if they light a fire under us and move our knowledge along.

Finally, like Alister, Linda Lonon Blanton offers suggestions for other scholars and teachers in the field of L2 writing, offered “for keeping the momentum of discipline building going.” Since all of us represented in this book, along with many others, are—no question about it—engaged in the process not only of teaching ESL writing students but of building a discipline, Linda's insights offer a helpful framework for the future of L2 writing research and an appropriate conclusion to this collection.

Again, as with Alister's 1996 conference talk, I found myself arguing with Linda as she spoke, particularly on the issue of “valuing qualitative research as we have valued quantitative research.” My quibble was first that I did not believe we had adequately “valued quantitative research” in L2 writing scholarship (and I would say the same for first language composition research, which can be shockingly soft as to its methodology) and that we had by no means exhausted its potential for informing us about the many questions for which we have no adequate research base. Second, I had always struggled with the tendency many scholars have to frame the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research as a dichotomy, and a necessarily adversarial one at that (even though Linda was not framing it that way).

In my view, all research paradigms have something to offer us, and they all have significant limitations. Nonetheless,

Linda's statements forced me to clarify my own thinking about various second language–writing research paradigms—so that I could critically assess my own research designs and so that I could articulate my position in a helpful way to my graduate students, arriving at my now strongly held conclusion that the best research programs combine elements of both quantitative and qualitative research. Once again, despite my initial resistance, Linda's point of view has been formative in my own thinking, teaching, and research over the subsequent years.

Closing Thoughts

So the stories in this collection bring us “up to date” as to the history of ESL composition instruction. But this history is no dry chronology; rather, it represents the rich diversity of experiences and opinions present in our work. And within the diversity are interwoven threads as well: (1) awareness of the uniqueness of the second language writer; (2) appreciation for the insights and input of the students themselves; (3) understanding of the importance of situating L2 writing instruction within the larger social and institutional contexts in which it occurs; (4) recognition that to be the best *teachers* we can be, we must also be *thinkers and questioners*; (5) building a discipline by considering and critically analyzing the research findings not only of our contemporaries in L2 writing but of those in related fields; and (6) asking a range of questions and utilizing a range of methodologies and paradigms to investigate these questions. Finally, we must recognize that no matter which “generation” of L2 writing scholars we identify ourselves with, that generation is, as Ilona puts it, “not the end of history.” And we must “guard against the complacency that puts our critical faculties to sleep” and never think “now we know it all.”

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