

Introduction

Why We Need to Consider Transitions in Teaching L2 across Educational Contexts

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For years, second language (L2) writing research involved higher education contexts, particularly college composition and writing across the curriculum, as well as graduate levels (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013; Hall, 2006; Matsuda et al., 2006; Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009; Swales & Feak, 2012). More recently, research has focused on elementary and secondary educational settings in order to understand how L2 writing is being taught, and what instructional and teacher education challenges exist (e.g., de Oliveira & Silva, 2016). However, there seems to be proportionally little concerted, systematic effort to understand *what* type of writing is taught *across* elementary, secondary, and college (hereafter referred to as K–16) L2 writing contexts, and *how* it is being taught on the long educational continuum. This book sets out to contribute, systematically, to what is perceived as a lack of the full picture, or *gestalt*, on the teaching of L2 writing from K–16. The impetus to look across educational settings, particularly at the places of transitions, stemmed in part from the recent state-wide educational reforms, including the Common Core

(e.g., de Oliveira, Klassen, & Maune, 2015), and a closer scholarly scrutiny of the teaching of writing in college settings in both L1 and L2 (e.g., Bastian, 2017; Crank, 2012).

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has brought new concerns about teaching L2 writing because K–12 teachers now face increasing demands to effectively teach academic writing to English learners (ELs), while preparing them to succeed on standardized tests. In higher education, the persistent challenge is to define “college level writing” in the first year composition because the field of college composition is broad and multiple theories have been developed. The persistent questions tend to be within the following few areas of definition: what is college writing, how is it taught in comparison to high school, what benefits does Advanced Placement in English bring, what assignment differences exist between high school and college, and many more (see Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2010). These issues are directly tied to the teaching of writing in high school settings and the problem of transferring writing knowledge from one setting to the next. Although some more recent scholarship has engaged the high school to college transitions, such as Ortmeier-Hooper and Ruecker (2017), most of their concerns are with the elements beyond academics (e.g., student life conditions that affect their college performance or retention).

It is no secret that many writing instructors in higher education struggle with incoming L2 writers who bring a number of writing issues to the first-year composition classroom, from types of writing the students can (or cannot) do to the length of assignments the students should produce (Roberge, Siegal, & Harklau, 2009). A wide range of writing competencies evident in the writing of incoming first-year students presents an additional challenge for teachers, because in high school students generally gain writing experience with shorter simpler texts, and thus tend to find college-level longer writing challenging (Kibler, 2011, 2016).

In addition to curricular matters, college writing instructors, in general, have not had the training or resources they need to help L2 writers in their classrooms. One must also look at writing

teacher education programs to learn how they are structured and how current L2 writing teachers were themselves taught to write in their courses they took as students. The focus on teacher education is surprisingly recent (e.g., Hirvela & Belcher, 2007; Larsen, 2013, 2016; Lee, 2010, 2011). Understanding what type of instruction student teachers receive and what types of genres they practice could help in the examination of teacher-related issues in K–16 contexts.

The issues of how to best “do” first-year composition and how to share responsibilities of supporting L2 writers across the disciplines in college seem to persist despite efforts to understand the value of best practices and professional development (e.g., Beaumont, 2015; Grujicic-Alatraste, 2010). The challenge is greater in the mainstreamed college composition classes with students of many different writing and educational backgrounds, including second and foreign language students.

Some of the more recent scholarship on L2 has attempted to explain the intricacies of L2 writing and the complex issues related to it. L2 curriculum shows the adverse impact of differing and complex contextual influences, such as multiple and sometimes contradictory theoretical and pedagogical views, instructors’ pedagogical preferences, larger institutional policies, as well as powerful societal and educational discourses on the topic of writing (Casnave, 2017). Due to an ever-increasing diversity in student populations in U.S. higher education (e.g., Lubie’s institution cites 109 foreign languages spoken on campus), faculty are presented with the challenge of understanding how L2 students developed their writing prior to arriving in college writing courses, what genres they learned, and what writing habits they developed. Gaining prior knowledge of these student histories is important because if the teachers are aware of them, students can be more effectively helped (Grujicic-Alatraste, this volume).

Given the long educational continuum in the K–16 domain, we feel that all parties involved—scholars, theoreticians, practitioners, materials writers, and classroom instructors—have a stake in building some type of common understanding of how L2 writing

instruction and learning happen in transitions *along the educational spectrum*, in order to facilitate greater L2 student writing success. This is particularly urgent in urban settings that are experiencing growing numbers of multilingual students (www.ncela.ed.gov). Moreover, in 2018, more ELs were in the lower grades (16.7 percent were kindergarteners) than in the upper grades (7.8 percent were 6th graders, 6.5 percent were 8th graders, and 4.1 percent were 12th graders) (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

The ELs from the K–12 public school settings largely become students in urban college settings and yet, the support for multilingual writers in public urban higher educational institutions is diminishing (O’Riordan, 2016). Some of the resident writer issues that Ortmeier-Hooper and Ruecker (2017) see as urgent for the entire country have been previously identified by teachers and researchers in large urban settings where colleges predominantly serve resident writers, such as New York (e.g., Otheguy & O’Riordan, 2000). Urban educators have warned about the crisis facing those resident writers specifically in New York (e.g., Brooks, 2017; Papatzikou-Cochran & Grujicic-Alatrisme, 2016): diminishing financial support, downsizing or even closing relevant programs, reduced out-of-class support, and moving toward the internationalization of the student body (e.g., O’Riordan, 2016) for larger financial gains.

In sum, we believe the *across-the-settings K–16 view* of L2 writing, we find, has not been sufficiently considered, but based on the challenges outlined so far, it should be. Given the gap in the L2 research that straddles all educational settings, this book addresses the need for a closer teacher collaboration and deeper, clearer understanding of writing goals in each of the educational settings and across them on the K–16 continuum. With this introduction, we hope to begin the exploration of what happens in those *transitional spaces* between the artificial borders set from one educational institution to the next that are bound by grade numbers instead of the need for students and teachers to continue working in unison to develop L2 writers. This book examines those spaces by asking

this question: *Are those transitional spaces presently complementary, contrasting, or just segregated from other settings on the writing education continuum?*

A Note on Terminology

References to L2 Writing and L2 Writers

As with most areas in education, different terms have been created in an effort to describe and represent—as accurately as possible—specific learner needs in diverse settings. In this book, the term *L2 writing* will be used to refer to second language writing more broadly understood. The term *L2 writers* will be used in most chapters (though not all) in combination with other terms understood to refer to the same or similar phenomenon. L2 writing is thus understood to include all of the following groups of student writers in K–16: English learners (ELs), immigrant writers, ESL writers (English as a Second Language), generation 1.5, or U.S.-educated multilingual writers, and *resident writers* (because they reside in United States and are distinct from foreign student writers). Although we realize that these seven terms may appear slightly less congruent, we feel the variety ensures that each contributor stay consistent with the terms they have been using in their individual research. After discussing terminology with some of our authors, we concluded that using a uniform term to refer to all contexts also may sound artificial. The differences in the pedagogy and methodology of teaching L2 writing are mirrored in different terminologies, so we did not want to mute the differences by using one term exclusively where ELs, ML, or ESL may be more context-appropriate.

References to Transitional Spaces

The word *transitions* has many potential meanings and is used to indicate any process of moving from one place or a situation to the next. This word can be confused with *transfer*, but we use it to refer

to *educational places and situations where transitions are likely to occur*. Transitional points refer to grade levels as they are currently set in most of the U.S.: from Grade 5 to 6; from Grade 8 to 9; from Grade 12 to 13 (i.e., secondary to college); and also from Grade 14 to 15 (i.e., community/junior college to four-year institution). Broadly defined, the transitions in this book are considered in the following contexts: from one grade level to the next; from one setting (i.e., school to after school); from being a student in the teacher education program to being a teacher. Transitions are also examined in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, educational policies, teacher and student expectations, as well as how a specific genre, argumentation, is presented in textbooks and taught across K–16.

Second Language Writing Transitions in the K–12 Contexts

In the early 1990s, Friedlander (1991) observed that immigration had a profound effect on society that could be equated to a demographic revolution, and its impact was in no place more obvious than in our K–12 schools. Since then, many demographic revolutions have continued to take place K–12. For example, the latest statistics on the number of ELs in the U.S. K–12 schools show 4.9 million, or 9.6 percent of the student body. The number of ELs in the lower grades is also on the rise (16.2 percent were kindergarteners), compared to the upper grades (8.5 percent were in elementary, 6.9 percent were in middle grades, and 4.1 percent were in high school) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019). In New York State (NYS), for example, during the 2015–2016 school year, ELs made up 8.8 percent of the K–12 student population. The distribution of ELs in the K–12 context in NYS mirrors the national statistics: More than half of all ELs are in elementary school grades (57.1 percent), while there are fewer in middle school grades (17.6 percent). One reason for the decline in later grades is as students become proficient in English they achieve

commanding/proficient on the NYSESLAT (required standardized test in NYS) and are no longer identified as ELs. However, they often are identified as long-term ESL students. More than one-quarter of all ELs in NYS are in high school, with 25.3 percent with high school being a major entry point for recently arrived ELs (New York State Education Department, 2015–2016).

There are a number of subgroups of ELs that represent the diversity of L2 writers and include the following: Newcomer ELs account for 63.3 percent of all ELs, developing ELs are 24.9 percent, long-term ELs are 11.7 percent, SLIFE are 8.7 percent, and ELs with disabilities are 21.9 percent. Again, this subgroup data highlights the diversity of the students that make up the second language K–12 writers (New York State Education Department, 2015–2016).

Given the diversity of learners and writers, it is important to consider the different academic language and literacy learning needs as these learners transition into and across academic literacies across contexts. Indeed, it is critical to understand all types of ELs in our schools, so that we can know how to help them. K–12 teachers, therefore, continue to face an increasing number of instructional and curricular challenges, they are often underprepared to teach L2 writing to all of the L2 writers in their classrooms (Matsuda et al., 2006). For example, in an examination of MA TESOL teacher candidates providing feedback to L2 writers, Crosby, Goldschmidt, & Ousey (2015) found that the teacher candidates had a lack of experience responding to L2 students and the various academic genres they were learning to write across educational contexts. It was clear that specific training is needed.

To understand what ELs are learning about writing in a new language across the K–12 context, it is important to understand the primary characteristics of academic literacies that shape L2 writing across the K–12 contexts. Learning to write in an L2 involves developing proficiency in “academic language” to be successful negotiating the curriculum (TESOL, 2018). However, this is because the characteristics of academic literacies across K–12 are very complex.

Schleppegrell (2004) has referred to academic language as “the language of schooling.” She characterizes academic language as having important concepts related to writing in a second language that include: (1) decontextualization, (2) explicitness, (3) complexity, and (4) cognitive demands. Schleppegrell (2004) also discusses linguistic features of academic registers and the genres of schooling, both of which are also distinct features of academic writing and areas in which L2 writers across K–12 contexts struggle with given their unfamiliarity with writing academic texts (see Caplan & Johns, 2019).

Other defining characteristics of academic literacies across K–12 contexts are the CCSS. With the introduction of the CCSS in 2010, the pace of academic writing instruction and the amount of academic writing required in the K–12 context has increased. In the past, the oral development of ELs was the first focus in the lower grades (Hudelson, 1989). This was based on the notion that children learned language by imitating the language they were exposed to in their environments. Moreover, the prevalent thinking at that time was that, because the skill of academic writing was too complex, it should be saved for later in the children’s educational experience. However, it has been shown that there is a strong developmental connection between spoken and written language (Weissberg, 2006) and there has been a shift in the teaching of academic literacy in the early grades in K–12. In addition to transitioning to academic literacy and the CCSS, other transitions that ELs make across contexts are:

1. the transition between two or more languages (Nam, 2018)
2. the transition between Englishes (e.g., BICS and CALP, Cummins, 2017)
3. the transition from spoken to written language (Zweiers & Hamerla, 2018)
4. the transition to school (academic) literacies (Peregoy & Boyle, 2016).

Later chapters will discuss these transitions in greater detail.

The chapters in this book will examine the writing that ELs are producing because of the CCSS, and the writing they are required to do once they reach the college or university, and where the intersections exist—that is, what do we as educators think English learners ought to be writing across educational levels? Furthermore, as we look at the differing L2 writing contexts in the K–12 grades, we see how the Common Core is shaping L2 writing for ELs. We must ask ourselves whether the standards do what they promise? Do they help teachers create a curriculum that develops key literacy skills for ELs that will transfer across grades and content-areas and from one teacher to another, or from one school to another? In other words, how effective are the standards in developing L2 writing for ELs—that is, creating communities of writers and critical thinkers? Moreover, how effective are the standards in promoting good L2 writing pedagogy? Therefore, it is left to trained K–12 teachers to intentionally implement this in their curricula, knowing that the ELs who walk into our classes at any age or grade will be at different places in terms of their development as academic writers.

In addition to the CCSS, standardized tests for K–12 also influence the way in which L2 writers write and understand academic writing. By the time ELs have completed their K–12 schooling, they will have completed 112 standardized tests (Hart et al., 2015). How has L2 writing been represented on these tests? How have these tests shaped the L2 writing development of ELs throughout K–12? Thus, it is imperative we prepare these learners for the academic literacy skills they will need as L2 writers and beyond.

Given that L2 writers face challenges with academic literacies, K–12 teachers face challenges teaching academic literacies, what if we examined writing as a language skill and its use across grade levels to try to discover where there are intersections and how they can be strengthened to help L2 writers develop their academic literacies? To do that, it is necessary to examine the contextual factors that influence these writers' production of academic writing. This requires knowing more about these writers, how the K–12 teachers have been trained to work with L2 writers, what theories

of L2 writing are being implemented for instructional purposes K–12, and which characteristics of academic literacies are L2 writers navigating and negotiating?

Transitioning from High School to College

Transitional points in higher education settings tend to be less frequently discussed in the literature on L2 writing. However, in our experience, there seems to be sufficient scholarly concern (see for example, Ferris et al., 2012; Harklau & Pinnow, 2009; Matsuda, Saenkhum, & Accardi, 2013), as well as anecdotal evidence, that indicates the struggles and frustrations on the part of teachers and students who teach and learn in transitional educational setting (Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2010). For example, writing teachers in 9th and 10th grades may wonder how they could meet and talk to bring their instruction more in line, or to help their students become aware of the information that may assist their writing progress in the next grade, particularly as it relates to genre choices. According to the New York State English Language Arts Common Core guidelines, the key writing goals for secondary education are grouped as Grade 9–10 and Grade 11–12 formations using the exact same language with the same broad goals repeated for both two-year levels. The transitions from junior to senior years in high school are either assumed or left to individual teachers to interpret however they can. This cannot be sufficient for continuous strong writing instruction, and yet it is all that is offered by official sources. Clearly, more research, deeper understanding of current practices, and insights into challenges are all needed as EL populations grow and as more teachers experience having L2 writers in their classrooms not only in urban, but also in rural areas.

Transitions from high school to college bring challenges such as, instructional choices, types and scope of writing, theoretical beliefs, and perceived and real student needs. First, the scope of writing in college differs across the country, as high school assignments

tend to be somewhat shorter and simpler texts (Kibler, 2016) than those produced in first-year writing in college. Some recent studies (e.g., Ray et al., 2015) on how much writing and what type of writing is being done in the classroom reveal a range in middle and high school grades, and within sections of the same grade level. The fact that the teaching of writing in high school is often more focused on text-based, short answers using formulaic structures, than on developing coherent, longer prose is partly the result of the Common Core Standards. On the other hand, success in college requires that students read longer texts, engage more deeply as they respond to a large variety of texts, and write in an array of so-called school genres (Caplan & Johns, 2019; Grujicic-Alatrisme, 2005).

Similarly, the types of written genres students are asked to produce in high school and in college also vary (Bastian, 2017), most likely depending on the city and state educational requirements and local educational decisions. Related to the type of written genres is the issue of classroom syllabi and program decisions made by each college's English department. Because teachers make individual curriculum decisions for their classroom—what genres to teach and how to go about teaching them—drawing clear conclusions about the high school-to-college transition is difficult. Teacher frustrations (Applebee & Langer, 2009) at both ends of the spectrum may urge us to begin the search for connections, similarities, and concerns that could lead to a better understanding of what kind of action needs to be taken to facilitate the transitions. For all writers, the understanding of the writing required in the disciplines and the initiation into those specific writing discourse communities starts only in college (Grujicic-Alatrisme, 2015; Crosby, 2009), so there is also a growing need to transition more successfully into disciplinary writing via Writing in the Disciplines initiatives (Crank, 2012).

Unlike the teaching institutions, professional organizations seem to have taken more of an initiative in this regard by organizing discussions at state TESOL Special Interest Group events (e.g., Grujicic-Alatrisme & Fifer, 2013), state AL conferences (e.g., Grujicic-Alatrisme, Susskind, & Fifer, 2014), or annual bridge-to-college

events in L2 writing (Grujicic-Alatrisme, Fifer, & Susskind, 2013). Urban universities have also focused on transitions more than rural colleges. For example, a couple of decades ago a public city university created a number of bridge programs to ensure a smoother transition (see www.cuny.edu/portal). However, even in these outreach programs, writing is not always center stage. Surprisingly, for states and cities with large populations of ELs in K–12 that feed into public colleges, almost no mention is made of specific writing strategies for successful transitions, nor are any sample curricula posted on the website. General description of transitional programs focus on counseling and are called “summer melts” (see for example CUNY’s LINCT to Success, which also includes transitional curricula). Still, meaningful professional conversations about transitions, initiated by high school teachers or by college writing instructors, are rare. Even within the same instructional level (e.g., from one classroom to the next across the same grade) discussions among teachers about writing curriculum, sharing writing assignments, or any similar teaching issue are not commonly represented in the literature on teaching L2 writing.

With this book, we propose to address the L2 writing challenges at transitional points by initiating more systematic discussions between the professional organizations of high schools and colleges, or between departments and schools. To achieve any true reform in the way that L2 writing is taught, conversations across levels and settings are an important first step.

Chapter Overview

The chapters in this book are exploratory in nature. We want to underscore “the exploratory side” because our authors who were invited to contribute to the discussion in this volume have different approaches to transitions and their challenges, and are uniquely situated to participate in this project. The contributing chapters are organized following the K–16 continuum, without any part breaks. We wanted the chapter organization to mirror our quest

for smoother transitions in educational settings, so we purposely avoided creating part divisions, although the K–16 continuum is implicit in chapter sequencing.

To achieve contextual and thematic unity, each chapter describes the educational setting where the researchers were engaged, examines specific issues related to transitions, and offers—where relevant—recommendations for classroom practices, teaching strategies, and instructional materials that may be useful for practicing teachers and all others professionally engaged in educating L2 writers across K–16.

In **Chapter 1**, Cathy Wong, Gillian Ober, and Bryan Meadows present a case study of an ESL teacher that examines the teaching of writing across an elementary and middle school and how this helps her ELs acquire writing. Specifically, the study takes a closer look at what strategies she uses in both elementary and middle school levels to engage her students' learning of writing. It concludes with challenges this teacher faces with writing instruction within and across the two classes.

In **Chapter 2**, Cathryn Crosby Grundleger focuses on a study of effective practices for teaching writing to ELs across K–2 classrooms. The discussion is based on the results from a case study of three young ELs and their transition to school literacy. Pedagogical implications for teachers teaching writing to young ELs, early childhood educators and practitioners, and school administrators are also discussed.

In **Chapter 3**, Luciana C. de Oliveira, Loren Jones, and Sharon L. Smith frame the discussion of L2 writing within SFL and genre pedagogy. The authors discuss two applications of the Teaching and Learning Cycle, one at the elementary school level and one at the tertiary level, thus illustrating the intersections across these educational contexts. They conclude by providing implications for the teaching of L2 writing as a continuum.

In **Chapter 4**, Ruth Harman, Nicole Siffrinn, Jason Mizell, and Khanh Bui draw on data from two ongoing projects where pre-service teachers are introduced to functional language resources (e.g., appraisal) and arts-based methods of inquiry (e.g., storytelling,

photography, drama) and they explore the collaborative, embodied, and reflective writing practices that teachers develop and use to design multimodal curricular modules. Through the course design, the future teachers are expected to transition recursively between acting as youth co-researchers and assuming their role as reflective middle and high school educators.

In **Chapter 5**, George Bunch and Heather Schlaman contrast secondary schools and community colleges regarding writing and writing instruction, particularly for multilingual students. They report on the language and literacy dimensions of community college coursework in a number of different professional preparation programs (e.g., allied health, early childhood education) and students' experiences navigating the pathways required to pursue these areas. They found mismatches among what students are required to do in their coursework in these areas, what they will ultimately need to do in the professions, and the ESL and English coursework they are required to take at the community college level.

In **Chapter 6**, Todd Ruecker examines the link between high school and college teachers. Drawing from ethnographic work at five rural high schools serving L2 writers, this chapter explores the divide between high school teachers and their working contexts and the theories and practices espoused by college faculty in terms of writing instruction for diverse learners. He concludes that teacher knowledge and student needs should be considered more carefully in ongoing debates on what instruction is best for L2 writers transitioning from high school to college.

In **Chapter 7**, Lubie Grujicic-Alatraste focuses on incoming high school students' perspectives on genres used on the writing admissions tests. Incoming L2 writers were asked to report on the types of written genres they typically used to practice in high school. The chapter provides a unique discussion of students' perceptions of their own genre preparedness to take college admissions writing test. Tapping into students' experiences may facilitate easier transitions into first-year writing and other college classes by placing students' high school learning as a starting point of college syllabi.

In **Chapter 8**, Michelle Cox discusses identity formation as a significant outcome of writing, particularly in first-year composition courses. Writing assignments can encourage student to inhabit an array of potential identities that can later help them transition more successfully from one course to the next. She draws on research on identity and resident multilingual writers to propose that composition instructors, when designing writing assignments, consider the identities that they hope to foster in students.

In **Chapter 9**, Dorothy Worden looks at novice teachers who come to the classroom with long histories as students. She examines the experiences of two novice teachers of college-level L2 academic writing as they make the transition from writing student to writing teacher. Rather than duplicating their experiences as students, the teachers selectively adapted the teaching practices from their apprenticeships of observation.

In the closing **Chapter 10**, Alan Hirvela reviews a range of teaching materials from across educational contexts to establish if and how argumentation is represented in textbooks. Since argumentation is one of the most commonly represented genres, this chapter affords an insight into pedagogical resources and their potential to facilitate transitions across educational settings.

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