Teaching Multilingual Learners Across the Curriculum: Beyond the ESOL Classroom and Back Again

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ABSTRACT: *Language and literacy are situated in specific classroom contexts and are acquired as students engage with the subject matter and tasks of these courses. Therefore, all faculty—not just those who teach courses devoted to teaching English to speakers of other languages (ESOL)—are responsible for contributing to multilingual students' acquisition of language and literacy. Drawing on qualitative research studies, including first-hand accounts of students and faculty who discuss their expectations and experiences in undergraduate courses across the curriculum, this article explores how faculty can facilitate the learning of multilingual students. Analyzing a variety of pedagogical strategies that faculty across disciplines have enacted in their own teaching, we find confirmation for our theory that when writing is assigned for the purpose of fostering learning, and when instructors provide supportive feedback in response to what students have written, writing can serve as a powerful means for promoting language acquisition. Significantly, this across-the-curriculum research indicates that when faculty transform their pedagogy to meet the needs of ESOL students, all students benefit. This research also has critical implications for the philosophical and pedagogical perspectives that bear on ESOL teaching.*

KEYWORDS: *linguistically diverse learners, faculty across the curriculum, language and literacy acquisition, writing to learn*

Multilingual learners who study in United States colleges and universities are remarkably diverse. Some are children of immigrants who were born in the U.S. and who learned a language other than English as their first language. Others are immigrants themselves: permanent residents or naturalized citizens who are bilingual and, in some cases, biliterate. Yet other students come directly to U.S. colleges from public high schools or private international schools in other countries. Within these different

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groups, students differ in their linguistic proficiency levels, opportunities to communicate in English, attitudes toward the language, and learning styles. These individual variables affect the process of second language acquisition, as does each student's level of anxiety or self-esteem and tendency to be inhibited or to take risks. Students' age and gender, linguistic and geographical background, social and economic positioning, and racial and religious identity, too, play a role in their educational lives, influencing whether, when, how, and to what extent they acquire a new language and adopt new ways of behaving and knowing.

This remarkable diversity, complicated even further by each student's multiple and shifting identities, defies attempts to make easy generalizations or predictions about individual learners or about particular groups of learners—even those who share the same first language or geographical background. Each student brings to the classroom a multiplicity of intersecting experiences and a constellation of linguistic and cultural factors that will influence how that student responds to classroom conditions and to assigned work. Those who come with strong first language literacy experiences may be able to do sophisticated work and, precisely because of the linguistic richness of their past experiences, may even outperform students who know only English. Those who have had limited academic experiences in their previous schooling may struggle as they try to negotiate unfamiliar literacy practices and new classroom expectations in a language they are still in the process of acquiring. Some students will have greater fluency in speaking English than in writing, while others will demonstrate greater facility in writing than their spoken language would suggest. Some may resist the kinds of tasks we ask them to perform because they are unfamiliar with such linguistic and literacy practices. Others may welcome such opportunities because they view this new way of approaching learning as beneficial or liberating. Even as we acknowledge these possible scenarios, we recognize that students' behaviors and classroom identities are not static. Students can change behaviors and shift identities in response to the different contexts in which their learning takes place.

At the same time that we acknowledge this multiplicity and complexity of experiences and backgrounds across students, we recognize that multilingual learners who are enrolled in college courses share in common the goal of performing competently across the curriculum even as their English skills are still developing. They cannot be expected to have achieved mastery of English before they begin to grapple with the demands of the academy. Nor can instructors of English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) be expected

to teach such a complex group of students all of the language they need in order to succeed in all of their courses. Language acquisition takes place not only through the study of language but also when language is used as a means for understanding and constructing knowledge. Language learners' development is thus the responsibility of all instructors, all of whom need to understand the process students undergo in order to acquire academic proficiency in an additional language.

Until recently, our understanding of undergraduate ESOL students' writing and learning processes was informed primarily by research that focuses on teaching students in ESOL contexts (see, for example, Canagarajah; Casanave; Ferris and Hedgcock; Harklau, Losey, and Siegal; Leki, *Understanding;* Silva and Matsuda; Zamel and Spack, *Negotiating*). As colleagues across disciplines have become increasingly concerned about the growing number of linguistically diverse students in their classrooms, and as they have reached out to ESOL professionals for guidance, a number of ESOL scholars have extended their research to address issues that have arisen in the context of courses other than ESOL (see, for example, Leki, "Coping"; Spack, "Acquisition"; Wolfe-Quintero and Segade; Zamel, "Strangers"; Zamel and Spack, *Crossing*). One of the most compelling findings of these studies is that, if multilingual learners experience alienation in many of their classrooms across the curriculum, so, too, do their instructors. Faculty may see ESOL students as lost in their courses, but they, too, may feel at a loss as to how to proceed. Given this finding, it is essential to explore what faculty need to know, and what they can do, in order to facilitate the learning of multilingual students.

Student Perspectives: Obstacles and Opportunities

As we began our explorations across the curriculum, we turned to the students themselves as a way to gain insight into their perspectives about their own experiences in college classrooms. We needed to hear their voices, voices that are rarely, if ever, heard when college faculty make curricular and pedagogical decisions. Through surveys, interviews, and reflective journals, we have asked hundreds of students to share what they think instructors should know about their academic needs. In their responses, students have readily acknowledged their linguistic struggles and cross-cultural disorientation. At the same time, because they do not want their work to be discounted or misjudged in response to their linguistic mismanagements, they have expressed appreciation for instructors who are understanding of their efforts.

Many of the students' responses relate to their concern about their ability or opportunity to express themselves completely and comfortably in spoken English. They fear that their linguistic and cultural differences mask their intelligence and knowledge. Not content to sit in silence, they want to be viewed as important contributors. But, they stress, they should not be expected do all the work on their own. They need to be drawn out, to be invited to join the conversation of the classroom, especially because they are often intimidated or deterred by the sophisticated vocabulary, rapid pace, unfamiliar topics, or unarticulated assumptions that characterize class or group discussions. Here is how one student describes the obstacles to her own participation:

> [The students] all speak with these "big" words and phrases that make me keep silent most of the time during the lectures. I know that they are not doing that on purpose, and I know that the teacher would like to hear my voice during the discussions, but even if I was confident enough in my English to raise my hand and participate in the discussion, the second problem comes to mind. By the time I convince myself that I had to add my opinion to the discussion, the whole issue would be over and the class would start a new subject and my mind would start the same process over again.[1]

The students also express concern about issues related to their academic literacy. They acknowledge that their written work may be replete with errors but emphasize that they devote a great deal of effort in their attempts to locate and eliminate them. In the words of one student, profound in their simplicity, "we don't want a single error in our paper, but what can we do? English is not our first language." The students also challenge the assumption that their written work is deficient, the result of intellectual weakness or laziness. What an instructor sees, that is, the paper that is handed in, rarely reflects the time, effort, and frustration that have gone into the composing:

> Sometimes I have a trouble in writing a English composition. For example when I was writing, I had a lot of good ideas, but I didn't know what word is in English because I was thinking by my native language. I used to take out a Vietnamese-English dictionary. After I found out, I couldn't continue the ideas which I was thinking. I tried to control my ideas by thinking about some ideas which I

could express in English without seeing the dictionary. This action wasn't helpful because it didn't satisfy what I wanted to write. (Spack, *Teaching* 17)

Just as writing can be an excruciatingly slow process for a language learner, so can reading, especially when texts contain an overwhelming number of unfamiliar words:

> During the last few days I had to read several (about 150) pages for my psychology exam. I had great difficulties in understanding the material. There are dozens, maybe hundreds of words I'm unfamiliar with. It's not the actual scientific terms (such as "repression," "schizophrenia," "psychosis," or "neurosis") that make the reading so hard, but it's the descriptive and elaborating terms (for example, "to coax," "gnawing discomfort," "remnants," "fervent appeal") instead. To understand the text fully, it often takes more than an hour to read just ten pages. And even then I still didn't look up all the words I didn't understand. It is a very frustrating thing to read these kinds of texts, because one feels incredibly ignorant and stupid. (Spack, *Teaching* 18-19)

Our ongoing research indicates that most students are devoting a great deal of extra time to their studies because of their linguistic challenges. At the same time, their responses make clear that they do not expect to be given less work—or less demanding work. But they do ask for assistance in finding effective ways to manage the workload and to gain access to the knowledge and strategies that will ensure success in their courses. Unfortunately, like the students in Ilona Leki's studies ("Coping"; "Narrow"), they are typically left to manage classroom expectations and conditions on their own, and their instructors are often unaware of students' attempts to negotiate the work of their courses.

Eleanor Kutz, too, turned to students as a resource for understanding what actually happens in classrooms across the curriculum. As part of her study of academic discourse communities, Kutz asked students to undertake ethnographic investigations of their own courses. Although the multilingual learners in Kutz's study had initially assumed that their academic progress would be compromised by their linguistic struggles, their concerns about language issues dissipated as a result of researching their classrooms and discovering that their academic success was tied to specific classroom contexts.

Through their own inquiries, these students became aware of how certain courses silenced them, making them feel like "outsiders," while other courses provided opportunities for entering classroom conversations and for unpacking difficult course readings, giving them the sense of being "insiders."

Vivian Zamel's longitudinal study of two undergraduate students, conducted over a six-year period, likewise underlines how particular conditions of courses and specific approaches of individual instructors can benefit or undermine a student's sense of progress and impact a student's sense of engagement or alienation ("Strangers"). The two students in the study, Martha and Motoko, wrote accounts in which they reflected on how they were affected, often in deeply personal ways, by numerous courses, including courses in their respective majors, biology and sociology (for extended samples of their writing, see Muñoz; Kainose). Both students described courses in which they felt encouraged, were engaged in genuine learning opportunities, and participated in meaningful writing and discussion. In the following account, for example, Martha explains how a biology professor made it possible for her to acquire the language of an immunology course:

> The Immunology lexicon was much easier to learn because of the simple and practical examples that he used to illustrate it with. We were exposed to daily situations to relate the meaning of the new words. Before he went into defining and introducing a concept or word, he played with it. He usually broke down words and did not assume that we knew what their roots were or meant. After he dissected the words, he presented the concepts and in that way it was more productive and easy to grasp the ideas. The concepts were perceived, received and learned. He kept on doing this during the entire semester and I kept on learning "the language of Immunology" too! (Muñoz 108)

For the most part, however, even though Martha and Motoko ultimately achieved academic success, they expressed disappointment in the often lifeless atmosphere of classrooms, the purposelessness of much of the assigned work, the passivity of many of the class discussions, and, especially, the absence of the kind of writing that could help them grow as learners. As Martha put it:

> Frustration and lack of interest are the present feelings with my classes because there is no planned "agenda" to encourage the stu-

dents to improve ourselves by writing. There is no rich opportunity to break barriers and answer questions to others and to myself. There is no REACTION AND INTERACTION. If you become a strong write[r], the writing "skills" will serve you as your personal Bible to summarize yourself. . . . It does not really matter how many courses the students take in order to "improve" skills of writing because what it counts is the responsibility encouraged by the teacher's method. It is an incentive for us to be listened and respected by our writing work! You get into it. Reading provides you grammar. Reading and writing are not separate in the process. It is a combined one. Doble team. Reacting and interacting.

Other longitudinal case studies also trace the jagged path that characterizes students' journeys through the curriculum. Trudy Smoke chronicles the writing experiences of one student over several years, beginning with Ming's initial and not always successful attempts to fulfill confusing or conflicting curricular demands. Smoke shows that Ming eventually succeeded in her academic work, in part through her own determination and effort, but especially when instructors assigned writing that was designed to help her learn the course material and construct knowledge—and when these instructors provided meaningful feedback that contributed to her growth as a thinker and writer. Marilyn Sternglass's case study ("'It Became Easier'") also captures the non-linear and context-dependent nature of a multilingual learner's academic performance. Having twice failed the writing assessment exam before entering college, Dolores was placed in a pre-freshman composition course, and she initially struggled to gain a foothold in her academic studies. But eventually, with the support of her psychology instructors, who encouraged her development as an independent researcher and acknowledged the value of her cultural background—even as they prodded her to strengthen her written expression—Dolores went on to major in psychology and to achieve a Master's Degree in that field.

And in yet another longitudinal case study, Ruth Spack ("Acquisition") documents how, over a three-year period, Yuko transformed unproductive approaches to academic work into productive strategies that increased her academic self-confidence. Over time, Yuko grew as a learner as she was immersed in the subject matter of her courses, as she learned to construct knowledge through her own reading and writing, and as her instructors provided her with guidance inside and outside of the classroom. Based on her numerous interactions with effective teachers across the curriculum,

Yuko identified several responsive teaching strategies that supported her learning, such as (1) building a course on the foundation of students' background knowledge and experience, (2) making connections between course content and real life, (3) relating course material to multiple social and cultural situations, (4) providing handouts to help students follow what is being presented, (5) reading aloud and analyzing excerpts from the assigned readings in class, (6), encouraging classroom interactions, (7) being accessible outside of class, (8) arranging student groups for study or research, (9) assigning informal writing tasks that help students make sense of the reading and tap into students' multicultural knowledge, (10) providing ongoing feedback on writing in progress that addresses content and helps students improve their writing style (Spack, "Acquisition" 52).

Taken together, these in-depth and long-term case studies of the experiences of multilingual learners give us a rich and complicated picture of the struggles and accomplishments of these students. The trajectory of their experiences was uneven, with progress in one course offset by a sense of frustration in another. Yet, despite their difficulties in certain classrooms, and despite early assumptions or indications suggesting they might be unable to negotiate the academic work they were expected to undertake, these students persevered and managed to achieve success. Finally, these studies, like much of the research on other students' experiences in college classrooms (see, for example, Chiseri-Strater; Herrington and Curtis; Sternglass, *Time*; Walvoord and McCarthy), demonstrate the critical role that supportive classrooms and responsive instructors can play in fostering students' academic success.

Faculty Perspectives: Errors and Changed Expectations

As we gained insight into students' perspectives and experiences, we soon realized that we needed to explore, as well, faculty perspectives and their experiences in their own classrooms across the curriculum. As we began to work with faculty who asked for our input, at our respective institutions and beyond, we adopted the kind of investigative stance that has always informed our research with ESOL learners. We wanted to discover why these teachers were struggling in the ways that they were reporting. What assumptions did these teachers have about the students? How had their previous teaching experiences shaped their expectations? What concerns did they have about students' performance and progress? How did the classroom dynamics and learning conditions within their courses affect students' work and partici-

pation? What kinds of writing were students assigned, and how did faculty read and respond to students' efforts to fulfill these assignments?

A number of prominent themes emerged in faculty responses to such questions. Of course, several instructors reported having had positive experiences working with ESOL learners in their courses. But even those instructors expressed concern about their interactions with many of the students. Instructors referred to students' silence, on the one hand, and to their incomprehensible language, on the other. They were concerned about students' written or spoken language, which they perceived to be inadequate for undertaking the work assigned in their courses. They were troubled by students' misreadings and erroneous interpretations of the texts assigned. Many faculty assumed that students' cultural or educational backgrounds prevented them from engaging in classroom discussions or from taking a critical stance in their writing. Those who focused on what they perceived to be students' linguistic deficiencies saw little potential in the students and had little hope that the students would be able to manage the assigned work. And few faculty entertained the idea that they could or should contribute to students' acquisition of language and literacy.

As our work with faculty proceeded, we were eager to get a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their concerns, confusions, and resistances. Our interest in this work eventually led to publication of *Crossing the Curriculum: Multilingual Learners in College Classrooms* (Zamel and Spack), a collection that includes chapters written by faculty across the curriculum who describe how they developed productive ways of working with the ESOL learners in their classrooms. As we invited faculty from different disciplines to contribute to this volume, we discovered that their initial experiences with ESOL learners echoed the themes that had emerged in our earlier explorations with other college faculty. Several professors, for example, speak of their earlier preoccupation with students' language errors, a preoccupation that prevented them from engaging meaningfully with the students' work. As anthropology professor Tim Sieber puts it, "I used to think that my major responsibility as an evaluator of writing, with respect to ESOL students, was to be a grammar policeman, to screen for errors, and to mark down students' grades accordingly, regardless of the content of their ideas" (140-41). Some of these professors initially questioned whether these students were capable of doing the work of their courses or even whether they should have been admitted to the college in the first place.

With the help of composition and ESOL specialists in their own institutions, these faculty examined their assumptions and expectations, and

they began to shift their perspective and reorient their thinking. Initially, their risk-taking path was uneven as they attempted to view and teach multilingual students in a different way. But with time and practice, they grew more comfortable with newly adopted pedagogical approaches, especially when they began to see the positive impact these approaches had on students' progress. They came to recognize that their preoccupation with ESOL learners' linguistic difficulties had not only shut them off from the students' insights and perceptions but did little to enhance students' progress or build their confidence. As these faculty acquired greater facility with a variety of approaches that made it possible for students to find their way into assigned texts, to take risks making tentative responses, and to feel acknowledged for their analyses and interpretations, they began to appreciate the richness of students' thought in spite of persistent error.

These changes occurred in large part because these faculty asked students to engage in informal writing-to-learn assignments such as reflections, response papers, letters, and journals that provided opportunities for students to react to, pinpoint themes in, make personal connections to, or raise questions about assigned texts. Anthropology professor Tim Sieber, for example, left behind his role as a "grammar policeman," invited students to draw on their own cultural histories and perspectives, and came to view ESOL learners' "complex multicultural competence [as] a positive resource in the learning of cultural anthropology" (135). Sieber notes that their "eloquent writing"—language errors notwithstanding—raised the expectations and standards he sets for all students, leading him to "encourage them to strive to reach the same levels of criticality and authenticity in their writing as ESOL students commonly do" (142). This shifting perspective on the part of college faculty is reflected in the experiences of other instructors as well. The account of Charlotte Honda, a professor of health and physical education (Abbott et al.), for instance, echoes the stories of the instructors with whom we have worked. Honda initially questioned ESOL students' intelligence on the basis of their language errors, but as she engaged students in writing assignments that were designed to promote their learning, her expectations about writing and about learners of English as a second language (ESL) changed: "The inclusion of [writing] keeps altering my traditional perceptions about teaching, as well as biases about ESL students" (104).

Other instructors, too, are sympathetic to multilingual students' struggles, but they may be reluctant to make curricular changes in order to accommodate students' needs. They may feel constrained by the perceived need to cover a body of material or, as in the case of the nursing

faculty interviewed by Ilona Leki, by the external demands imposed by an accreditation board ("Living"). Though Leki does not offer suggestions for the particular case she examined, she recommends that faculty "stay alert to possible openings that present themselves" for transforming the classroom (96). We see such openings in innovative collaborative programs that create opportunities for engagement and that introduce writing-to-learn pedagogy across the curriculum. At Hunter College, for example, in her role as coordinator of the writing across the curriculum program, ESOL specialist Trudy Smoke works with graduate Writing Fellows from a variety of disciplines whose role it is to partner with faculty as they integrate writing into their courses. Under Smoke's guidance, the Fellows develop productive strategies for working with ESOL learners. Another collaborative initiative of this sort is Kingsborough Community College's Intensive ESL Program, which provides English language support in conjunction with credit-bearing courses across the curriculum. All faculty members involved in this cross-disciplinary program meet regularly to develop productive approaches to the students' course work (Mlynarczyk and Babbitt).

We see such openings, too, in the slowly emerging body of scholarship on linguistically diverse learners produced by college faculty across disciplines. Much of this scholarship is informed by collaborations with specialists in ESOL and writing across the curriculum, by the literature on teaching multilingual learners, and by consultations with the students themselves. These publications document some of the pedagogical adjustments and innovations that instructors and institutions in the United States, South Africa, and Australia have enacted in their classrooms and programs in order to foster students' academic success in several fields, including psychology (Winter), biology (Ambron; Feltham and Downs; Rosenthal), human services (Kanel), and nursing (Caputi, Engelmann, and Stasinopoulos; Choi; Klisch; Shakya and Horsfall). The very existence of this body of work testifies to the growing acknowledgment across the curriculum that finding productive ways to teach linguistically diverse learners is necessarily a shared responsibility.

Language Acquisition Across the Curriculum

Faculty who teach in disciplines across the curriculum, like many of the students they teach, come to the classroom with background knowledge and skills that may be inadequate when they are faced with unfamiliar language and linguistic practices. And like their students, they need opportunities to

reconsider their assumptions and expectations in order to engage meaningfully with the work they are challenged to undertake. In short, these instructors are often as "underprepared" to work with multilingual learners as multilingual learners are to work with them, and they can benefit from the very principles that inform ESOL instruction.

Fundamental to these principles is an understanding of the process of language acquisition. Contrary to what many faculty may assume about linguistic competence, language is not a decontextualized skill that is learned once and for all time in courses devoted to the study of language. Rather, the acquisition of language and academic literacies—which, too, are languages—is a long-term and evolving process. Language learners progress through various, somewhat predictable, stages as they slowly achieve closer and closer approximations of the target language. Throughout this constructive process of acquisition, students continue to formulate and test out hypotheses about the unfamiliar language they encounter in new contexts, as well as the norms and conventions associated with this language. Students may acquire facility with some aspect of language or literacy in one situation only to be set back when faced with new linguistic challenges. This natural, inevitable process reflects what occurs when anyone attempts to acquire a language, as we remember when we recollect our own study of a foreign tongue. It is therefore counterproductive to conflate linguistic performance with intellectual competence. Yes, second language features of writing may persist. But this phenomenon exists precisely because language errors represent linguistic patterns that are logically derived and that therefore may be resistant to change or corrective measures. Students are capable of undertaking complex academic tasks and making original and significant contributions to the disciplines they are studying even when they show signs of struggling with language and even though their language acquisition process is not smooth and straightforward. Furthermore, because language is acquired over time, none of us can make safe predictions about students' competence or potential on the basis of testing results or their early performance in college courses. Even students whose initial college experiences are marked by failure, frustration, or fear can make progress and excel, as studies of students' actual experiences have demonstrated.

Crucial to this perspective on language and literacy acquisition is an understanding of the contextualized, embedded nature of this process. Language and literacy are situated in particular classroom contexts and are acquired while learners engage with the subject matter and tasks of these

courses. It is instructive, in fact, to view each classroom as a culture in its own right, with its own language practices, norms, and conventions, in order to understand the dynamic interplay between learning and context. When the classroom culture is conducive to learning, students can make progress. In the very process of struggling to understand course material, students develop new strategies for learning unfamiliar subject matter and for acquiring the language of that subject matter. Indeed, studies of the classroom experiences of both multilingual and monolingual learners underline the contingent nature of learning and point to the ways teachers' intentions, expectations, and approaches promote or undercut students' performance and progress and either contribute to students' sense of accomplishment or silence them.

Yet another principle relates to the critical role writing can play as students negotiate the academic work assigned in courses across disciplines. Arguing that the benefit of writing in college courses has not been demonstrated for multilingual learners, Leki ("Challenge") raises questions about whether the role of writing is "overrated" in the academic progress of these students. We, too, would be concerned if the kind of writing students are asked to produce is not designed to promote their learning—or if writing is not assigned at all. But the research on multilingual students' experiences across the curriculum clearly demonstrates that when students are given multiple, meaningful opportunities to write (not just to read) as a way to learn within their courses, they can engage actively with the material they are studying, make sense of their texts, generate ideas and interpretations, make connections, experiment with unfamiliar language and literacy practices, and construct new knowledge. Precisely because writing gives students the safety and time to deliberate and reflect on their thoughts and interpretations, it can lead to insights and understandings that students might otherwise not have had.

This time and safety also make it possible for students to consider not just what they want to say but how they will say it, a major concern of many multilingual learners, whose silence may belie their engagement or their willingness to participate. The opportunity to shape ideas in writing before a class discussion begins can reduce the resistance and fear ESOL learners may be experiencing. And because writing engenders students' understanding and language acquisition, because it allows students to rehearse and articulate their thoughts, it can enable students' classroom participation and make it possible for otherwise silent students to be heard. Furthermore, such an opportunity allows for the possibility of students' taking risks with

language—which in turn leads them to acquire it. In addition to benefiting students, writing gives faculty opportunities for gaining insight into students' thoughts and interpretations and for responding to and drawing on students' written work in order to promote further learning. A prime example of this phenomenon is captured in the following student commentary:

> The first day of the [philosophy] course, the professor gave us an ungraded paper assignment: The subject was about our image toward philosophy. On the second day, he posed the same question to the class, and started to call on the students from the first row. Since I was sitting in the left corner of the front row, he called on me by verifying my first name. I was nervous to speak up in front of everybody whom I had not yet known, but because I already organized my idea and image toward philosophy last night in my assignment, though it was far from the fluent English, I somehow managed to bring myself to the end.
>
> After I finished, the professor briefly summarized what I just said by using more sophisticated and philosophical sounding words. Then he raised two important issues from my statement and wrote down on the blackboard. I felt so delighted. I felt I was included. I felt my existence was affirmed. The reason why I was and still am hesitated to raise my voice in the classroom is because I am always intimated by two big worries, which are "Will everybody be able to understand what I say?" and "Is my idea important enough to be raised?" Most of the time, these two questions envelop my mind so that I cannot release my words; especially when I sense that the class circumstance is neither comfortable nor worthy enough to take the risk.
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> But this time, the professor displayed very warm and sensitive conduct before me. Perhaps that was a really trivial matter for other people, but because I was always worried about my English deficiency, even such a small matter became a big deal in my mind. A kind of hope was gradually growing in my mind. . . . (Kainose 114)

Given how writing contributes to the progress of multilingual students and allows them to play a more active role in their classrooms, we believe that the term *basic writing*, the very name of this professional journal, needs to be understood not as a description of some less developed level of literacy but as an affirmation of the principle that *writing is basic to learning.*

A final principle that is shaped by and informs our ongoing work with students and faculty underlines the role that faculty, regardless of content area, can play in fostering students' ongoing progress as learners, readers, writers, and language users. While multilingual learners can make remarkable progress in ESOL programs, instructors in courses beyond ESOL cannot expect that these students will have acquired all of the language and literacy they need in order to undertake the work of these courses. Faculty beyond the ESOL classroom, too, can promote students' learning and acquisition of language and literacy by building on students' understanding, viewing students' contributions as valuable to the work of the course, seeing students' struggles as a mark of learning in progress, offering students multiple opportunities for rehearsing unfamiliar tasks, and providing meaningful feedback and guidance in response to students' work. Recent large-scale studies provide documentation to show that active and deep engagement in absorbing and challenging work has a critical, positive impact on students' academic progress, and that this outcome is especially true for diverse learners who enter college with limited academic experiences (Bain; Cruce et al.; Kuh et al.). The assumption that such progress is possible positions linguistically diverse learners to take on the demands of intellectually sophisticated work, make significant gains in their learning, and—it needs to be underlined—acquire language. The findings of these extensive studies underscore our point that the issues that arise out of linguistic diversity need to be viewed not as problems but as opportunities for both faculty development and student learning.

Teaching diverse learners can push faculty to question unexamined assumptions, see their disciplinary practices in a new light, and adopt new ways with words. But such a changed perspective on teaching does not mean that instructors need to lower their expectations, compromise their standards, or reduce the rigor of the academic work they assign. On the contrary, the pedagogical approaches that many instructors have enacted ask more of students, requiring students to make a deeper and more genuine commitment to their academic work. This pedagogical shift can thus serve to drive expectations and standards higher. And while the shift may be catalyzed by the challenge of teaching multilingual learners, it is critical to recognize that this reconceptualized pedagogy does not promote the learning just of ESOL students. Precisely because the presence of multilingual learners requires teachers to examine and reflect on the work they do, all classroom participants—students and teachers alike—benefit. This view is echoed by Linda Caputi, Lynn Englemann, and John Stasinopoulos, who address the

needs of nursing students for whom English is an additional language (EAL) and who conclude that "as a teacher implements teaching strategies that will benefit EAL students, most of these strategies will benefit all students enrolled in nursing courses, making the reason to implement these strategies even more valuable" (111). And as literature professor Rajini Srikanth comes to understand, learning how to teach the multilingual students in her courses has transformed her into a more "thoughtful teacher" overall (194).

Back to the Future of the ESOL Classroom

Our explorations of the experiences of faculty and multilingual students in courses across the curriculum have brought us back full circle, for they inform the philosophical and pedagogical perspectives that bear on the role we play as ESOL writing instructors and the work we envision for ESOL composition classrooms. What we have learned from these explorations underlines how crucial it is that we continue to "dive in," as Mina Shaughnessy puts it, investigating students' composing processes and literacy histories; examining the effect of our course content, assignments, and feedback on students' ongoing work; exploring what happens when writing becomes a means for risk taking, generating ideas, and engaging in intellectual work; and analyzing the logic of students' interpretations and language use.

One particular issue that merits far greater attention in ESOL teaching is the central role that writing can play in *any* ESOL course, a finding that is reflected in the studies of college classrooms across disciplines in which multilingual learners have achieved academic success. Most ESOL instructors and researchers, like other faculty and scholars across the curriculum, have yet to recognize that writing does not just *display* language acquisition, writing *promotes* language acquisition. One recent illustration of the lack of understanding of the vital role writing plays in language acquisition is reflected in Eli Hinkel's "Current Perspectives on Teaching the Four Skills," which appears in *TESOL Quarterly*'s 40th Anniversary Issue, a publication that was meant to provide a state-of-the-art account of developments in the ESOL field. While Hinkel acknowledges the importance of integrating writing with reading and with the study of content, she nevertheless represents writing as a "skill" that is acquired through the study of grammatical, lexical, and discourse features of texts. Such a narrowly conceptualized view of writing limits possibilities for teaching and learning, for it fails to take into account how writing facilitates language use.

One reason that this limited perspective persists in the ESOL field is that

second language acquisition researchers have by and large not considered or investigated "how students learn a second language through writing," as Linda Harklau points out (332). In our own ongoing research, we have been collecting anecdotal evidence that attests to the generative role that writing can play in students' linguistic development. As the following student comment illustrates, writing can promote growth in vocabulary:

> Something that I've just noticed is that I just use a new word or a more complex sentence structure in my spoken language after I've used it many times in my texts. My writing works as a laboratory where I try out new language, I test its usage, and it slowly becomes part of my spoken language. It's funny, but the first time a new word comes to my mind when I'm speaking, I avoid its use. Let's say the word "barely" is new for me. I'll use it several times in my written language before it becomes part of my spoken language. Even thou[gh], the first time this word comes to my mind when I'm speaking, even knowing its meaning and the proper circumstances to its use, I'll be afraid to use it. So one day, unconsciously, "barely" will escape through my mouth in conversation, and it becomes part of my speaking.

Writing can also contribute to the ability to speak and to participate in classroom conversations:

> Writing . . . makes my voice heard. As a non-native speaker of English, I find it hard to use spoken speech as a means of meaningful communication in front of many people. Similarly, I do not think I can convey all the ideas I want to express in oral communication. Writing can fill this gap of mine. In writing, I have a good time to communicate with myself, then to write down what I want to share with others. The information I bring to the discussion of the reflection on a certain reading is hardly misunderstood. Being a member of the class, I do want to get involved in class activities and to be heard. Writing is a form of class participation, an act of how I communicate with the authors of the materials and of how I make my thoughts understood and myself be heard.

And writing can facilitate reading:

The more I write about the readings, the more I can see a part of myself or my experience reflected when I understand what the writers wanted to say. That is the real meaning of reading.

Another important reason that I like reading and writing about reading which I only recognize when I read and write in English is I learn more about power of language. I could not see or put myself in the readings so I could understand or sympathize with the writers when I read in Vietnamese. I had such a hard time with that job that I could not imagine doing it in English. Especially English is my second language which I thought even makes the situation more difficult. It would be a surprise to say that I have a better job with reading and understand the readings in English more than I did in Vietnamese but that is what I feel right now.

I could not recognize why I like reading until my first class of writing about my ideas. . . . I learn that there is no right answer for what we know about readings which gives us more chance to open our ideas. The more we are open to express our ideas, the more we want to learn power of the words we use.

Not only does writing promote language acquisition, it can also lead to the adoption of new "textual identities," a phenomenon that has been demonstrated by students whose writing (rather than speaking) in English (rather than in their first language) becomes the source of their academic authority and security (Kramsch and Lam). Precisely because writing engages students in language that they are consciously thinking in, thinking about, and manipulating, it allows students to acquire a linguistic authority and authorial identity that they otherwise might not have acquired. A number of well-known authors for whom English is an additional language have written eloquently about this process (see their accounts in Lesser; Novakovich and Shapard). And students, too, have acknowledged how writing in English has transformed them into writers (Zamel, "Toward"). After chronicling her own frustrating, embarrassing, and "suffocating" experiences as a writer in China, for example, this student explains how writing in English has given her a new identity:

My path in English made a 180-degree swerve when I started to encounter writing in English. My interest in English writing accumulated day by day. Accompanied by this cumulative learning process, my resentment toward writing was lessened and my affec-

tion toward writing started to grow. I reknew writing in another way. I played with English words with more ease when I was writing, which was quite different from the way I used to labor in Chinese writing. I turned into another person when I was writing in English. Amazingly, learning English altered my concept in writing as well as myself as a writer. It was totally unbelievable progress in writing to me even though English was my second language. I felt I had such a special connection to this language that even my mother tongue could not tantamount to this connection. English gave me the confidence and faith in writing. Without learning and writing in English, I would never come to realize that I would like writing and that I could become a good and confident writer.

Our work across the curriculum challenges deficit models of language and learning that foreground students' linguistic mismanagements and misunderstandings, drive skills-based and form-focused assessment and placement procedures that do not allow for genuine demonstrations of students' competence, and become the basis of programmatic policies that may exclude students from the very courses they want to enter. These deficit models draw on idealized and normative representations of language and behavior, what Mary Louise Pratt calls "linguistic utopias," and serve to justify a research agenda and pedagogical orientation that frames ESOL students' difference as deficiency. Such an exclusionary perspective is illustrated, for example, in an oft-cited review of research on the writing of ESOL students, a review that represents the "distinct nature" of ESOL students' writing as problem (Silva). Tony Silva's summary of the literature indicates that, when compared to monolingual students, ESOL students write texts that are "simpler . . . less fluent, less accurate, and less effective"; compose in ways that are "more constrained, more difficult, and less effective"; and are incapable of performing as well as or meeting the same standards on writing tests as their monolingual counterparts (668-70). Yet, as Suresh Canagarajah points out, Silva does not critically question these findings or the framework of the comparison, which leads to a representation of ESOL student writing as lacking. Moreover, by not challenging the use of monolingual students' writing as a standard of measurement, Silva's review perpetuates the notion that a stable and uniform standard of writing exists. Finally, Silva fails to cite any evidence that demonstrates positive aspects of ESOL students' writing. Paradoxically, in a later article, while reaffirming the value of the research findings of his earlier review, Silva and his co-authors critique studies of

ESOL writing that "tend to portray L2 writers as 'problems' or as producers of problematic prose" (Silva et al. 94).

We welcome this critique. Focusing on students' limitations, we strongly believe, keeps us from seeing the richness and intelligence of students' understandings and leads to decisions that can pre-empt or undercut students' progress. Such a perspective is enacted not only when students' language or writing is viewed as problematic or wanting. The tendency to make generalizations about students on the basis of assumptions about their cultural background, and then to make predictions or draw conclusions about their performance on the basis of such generalizations, shuts us off from understanding the full complexity of students' potential, identity, and sense of agency. Such an essentializing stance, whereby cultures are reduced to idealized and normative models, to *cultural utopias*, leads to culturally determined explanations about students' learning and behavior. Furthermore, when cultures are viewed as monolithic and static entities, and when multilingual students are measured against individuals representing an idealized target culture, difference, again—as is the case with language—is perceived as deficiency. As David Watkins and John Biggs have found, such a perspective can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies, blinding instructors to students' actual competence, adaptive strategies, and critical thinking skills. Several scholars have challenged this practice of cultural essentialism and determinism—which, they show, continues to be perpetuated in the ESOL field—and call for research and practice that takes into account the complexity and hybridity of culture when students literally and figuratively cross borders (Canagarajah; Kubota; Kubota and Lehner; Leki, "Cross-Talk"; Spack, "Rhetorical"; Thesen; Tucker; Zamel, "Toward").

What we have learned from longitudinal studies of students' across-the-curriculum college experiences attests to the fact that students' previous educational or cultural experiences, initial linguistic struggles in their courses, or inadequate performance on proficiency tests, do not reflect what students are capable of accomplishing. The following student comment reminds us that the conditions for learning that students may have been accustomed to do not necessarily limit their potential or performance in their new learning environments. Indeed, having experienced her earlier educational settings as limiting, this student welcomes courses that allow for students' contributions and active participation:

> I succeeded in my studies in Haiti by doing what the teachers asked without thinking about what I myself wanted or needed to

learn. I always thought that whatever the teachers asked to study was all there was to know. I substituted memorization of obscure information for learning. I learned not to open my mouth in class to ask questions or make comments. It is hard to comment on teachers' lectures because the teacher thinks he or she is always right and know everything. He might even reprimand a student for correcting him or her.

I now personally love classrooms where students are not very restricted. Although I do not feel free expressing my ideas all the time but I certainly like to listen about what others think and compare ideas. Concerning my not feeling free to express my ideas, I'm only that way because in my early learning years I was not used to have the chance to do so. That is why I feel it is necessary. I like it a lot when students share opinions and give their interpretations to what is being taught. When more opinions and ideas are shared in a classroom, a student gets a chance to look at the subject from other angles. It creates a suited environment for diversity. Also, when students get a chance to give opinions about a certain subject, it helps other students to grow and complete their ideas even more. A student might have had an idea but do not know how to word it but a hint from another student's interpretation may help. Students should be allowed to give their objections also in every subject matter because more interpretations of the same matter may increase the chance of understanding it better. There is a French saying that says *"au choc des idées jaillit la lumiere"* more or less in English would say, where a lot of ideas are met there is illumination. I totally agree with it.

As this student's account suggests, as even her use of two languages demonstrates, what may be "different" about ESOL learners is not that they are deficient but that they are uniquely resourceful. Multilingual students may struggle in English, but they may also be able to draw on another language to develop their ideas. Their writing may be "unsettling in terms of grammar and syntax," but that same writing may be original in both style and content (Spack, *Teaching* 53). Their knowledge may be incomplete in some subject areas, but they may have significant background knowledge in other spheres. In short, students draw on their particular linguistic backgrounds and cultural knowledge—their "differences"—in order to succeed as learners.

The findings about what can and does happen across the curriculum raise critical questions about the service ideology underlying the teaching of multilingual students, an ideology that suggests that "the literacy demands made in a range of real academic contexts should drive instructional planning" in ESOL courses (Grabe 258). But the multifaceted and heterogeneous nature of the academic work students are asked to undertake across disciplines, and the specific and often unpredictable ways individual faculty frame that work—even in courses within the same discipline—make clear that the goals of the ESOL classroom cannot be determined by unexamined assumptions about the demands and features of other academic courses (Spack, "Initiating"; Spack, "Acquisition"; Zamel, "Questioning"; Zamel, "Strangers"). As investigations of courses across the curriculum have demonstrated, the academic work that students encounter is rarely amenable to generic or monolithic representations of discipline-specific work that students can simulate in ESOL classrooms. Students come to understand and engage with the cultural ways of the classroom—its language, practices, norms, genres, and conventions—through immersion in that classroom. Language and literacy practices are not static but rather are embedded in content and tied to specific contexts. Language is acquired, and will continue to be acquired, through meaningful engagement with content, as students have ongoing opportunities to use language. ESOL courses are as "real" as any other courses across the curriculum when they offer possibilities for content-saturated activity. ESOL writing instructors should therefore develop their own intellectually challenging curricula whose content, texts, and assignments involve students in authentic and meaningful work and thus facilitate their acquisition of language and literacy.

Explorations and investigations across the curriculum have yet another critical implication for the positions ESOL professionals hold in their institutions and the pedagogical commitments they make in their classrooms. Our own work with faculty in other disciplines reveals how such collaborations can subvert the hierarchical and disciplinary divisions that permeate educational institutions and that typically relegate ESOL and writing programs to a service position. Such dialogic, reciprocal, and generative relationships make it possible for all of us who teach multilingual students to engage each other in new ways as we share concerns and insights. This work across the curriculum underlines the need for instructors in academic institutions to work together to change academic institutions so that we can find ways to be more responsive to the diversity of learners. Just as Mina Shaughnessy called for writing teachers to "remediate" not students but themselves, so

too do institutions need to be transformed if they are to meet the challenges of teaching students in meaningful ways.

Our awareness of how students can come to feel marginalized, discouraged, or silenced in their courses across the curriculum has strengthened our conviction that the academic work assigned in ESOL writing classrooms cannot be dictated by and ought not to replicate the problematic and unsuccessful approaches often adopted in such courses. At the same time, our awareness of how instructors in a range of courses have enacted pedagogical approaches that contribute to multilingual learners' academic success confirms the value of actively engaging students in work, especially written work, that promotes the acquisition of language and literacy and the construction of knowledge. These across-the-curriculum discoveries, about obstacles and opportunities, errors and changed expectations, illuminate the work before us, both in ESOL classrooms and beyond.

Note

1. Unless otherwise noted, the excerpts from student writing that appear throughout this article are previously unpublished texts drawn from our ongoing research on multilingual learners' experiences in our ESOL classrooms and beyond.

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