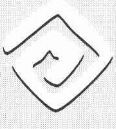
Academic Writing Programs

Edited by Ilona Leki

Case Studies in TESOL Practice Series
Jill Burton, Series Editor



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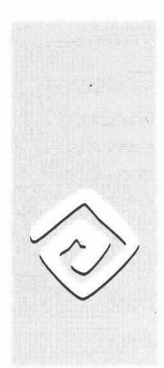
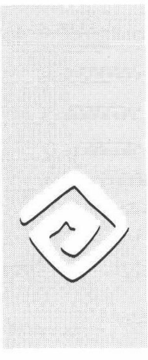


Dedication

To the real Kenny, with love.



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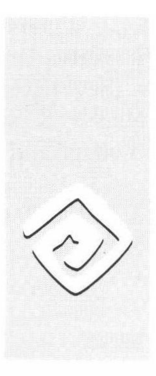


Series Editor's Preface

The Case Studies in TESOL Practice series offers innovative and effective examples of practice from the point of view of the practitioner. The series brings together from around the world communities of practitioners who have reflected and written on particular aspects of their teaching. Each volume in the series will cover one specialized teaching focus.

CASE STUDIES

Why a TESOL series focusing on case studies of teaching practice?

Much has been written about case studies and where they fit in a mainstream research tradition (e.g., Nunan, 1992; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Perhaps more importantly, case studies also constitute a public recognition of the value of teachers' reflection on their practice and constitute a new form of teacher research—or teacher valuing. Case studies support teachers in valuing the uniqueness of their classes, learning from them, and showing how their experience and knowledge can be made accessible to other practitioners in simple, but disciplined ways. They are particularly suited to practitioners who want to understand and solve teaching problems in their own contexts.

These case studies are written by practitioners who are able to portray real experience by providing detailed descriptions of teaching practice. These qualities invest the cases with teacher credibility, and make them convincing and professionally interesting. The cases also represent multiple views and offer immediate solutions, thus providing perspective on the issues and examples of useful approaches. Informative by nature, they can provide an initial database for further, sustained research. Accessible to wider audiences than many traditional research reports, however, case studies have democratic appeal.

HOW THIS SERIES CAN BE USED

The case studies lend themselves to pre- and in-service teacher education. Because the context of each case is described in detail, it is easy for readers to compare the cases with and evaluate them against their own circumstances. To respond to the wide range of settings in which TESOL functions, cases have been selected from diverse EFL and ESL settings around the world.

The 12 or so case studies in each volume are easy to follow. Teacher writers describe their teaching context and analyze its distinctive features: the particular demands of their context, the issues they have encountered, how they have effectively addressed the issues, what they have learned. Each case study also offers readers practical suggestions—developed from teaching experience—to adapt and apply to their own teaching.

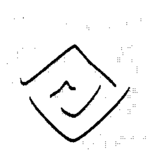
Already published or in preparation are volumes on

- action research
- assessment programs
- bilingual education
- community partnerships
- content-based language instruction
- distance learning
- EFL in primary schools
- English for specific purposes
- intensive English teaching
- interaction and language teaching
- international teaching assistants
- journal writing
- mainstreaming
- teacher education
- teaching English as a foreign language in primary schools
- technology in the classroom

THIS VOLUME

The authors in this volume portray the international role of written English in the academic context, and clearly demonstrate how writing is integrated in all aspects of academic communication in English. Writing from all over the world, the authors address how English teachers of nonnative speakers can bring educational content and life experience into academic writing programs in English and, in turn, how TESOL can be included in mainstream academic programs.

Jill Burton
University of South Australia, Adelaide



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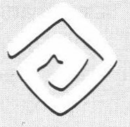
INTRODUCTION



Accessing Communities and Disciplines Through L2 Writing Programs

Ilona Leki

In tertiary academic settings, writing is a privileged skill. It has received a great deal of research attention, probing the cognitive process of writing through protocol analyses, for example, and the conveniently stable product (or succession of products in drafts) through text analyses. Writing also has dramatically visible consequences for students' academic lives, particularly in English-medium institutions, where not only students' writing or language skills are evaluated but also, through essay exams, their disciplinary knowledge can be evaluated. Sometimes conclusions are even drawn (unfairly) about students' intellectual capacities based on the second language (L2) writing they produce. Writing samples open and close doors to academic advancement for students in ways no other language skill does. For these reasons, teaching L2 writing has taken on enormous significance.

This volume of the Case Studies in TESOL Practice series focuses on innovative courses and programs designed to teach L2 writing in a wide range of academic settings worldwide—ESL and EFL, elective and required, intensive and regular, in English-medium and non-English-medium institutions—and to a variety of student types—professionals and graduate students with extensive disciplinary knowledge and experience; young, inexperienced undergraduates; those with high and low levels of language proficiency; students in English-speaking countries on visas and as immigrants, some having little academic experience in any language. Each chapter begins by describing the historical, institutional, and, sometimes, community context of the L2 writing course, and then details the workings of the program and its distinguishing features. Not all the chapters included here describe radical innovations (though some do, and what is radical in one context may well be the norm in another), but each one represents a unique response to perceived L2 writing needs and local solutions to local problems confronting L2 writing teachers in many geographical locations, in different contexts, and at different levels of proficiency.

Most noteworthy about the courses and programs described in this volume, however, are not the differences but certain similarities of basic assumptions underlying the many local solutions to the question of how best to teach L2 writing. Many of these programs consciously position themselves as focused on what language needs they think students will face in their other academic courses or as participants in the social and political life of their communities. In each of the programs, learning to write in an L2 is not considered to be an end in itself but,

rather, learning to use a tool with a special capacity to link and integrate other language skills; to probe and consolidate budding disciplinary knowledge; to unite the L2 writers with other individuals and communities; and to facilitate access to different social, political, and intellectual worlds.

Rather than teaching L2 writing in isolation, then, language skills such as reading, conversation, academic listening, and data gathering play significant roles in nearly all of the programs described here (e.g., in Flowerdew's integrated science and English courses and Hall's student-directed program in Australia). Linking and integrating these kinds of skills includes, in some programs, use of the first language (L1) as an appropriate and natural bridge to expressing real ideas and information in the L2 (e.g., in Hirose's course for English majors in Japan).

In these programs, L2 writing courses are designed to give L2 writing students easier, more profoundly enabling access to new worlds of disciplinary knowledge and community—a role that is arguably more important than integrating language skills. Note the number of L2 writing courses that are adjuncted or linked in some way to other disciplinary courses, for example, to a classics course (see, e.g., Smoke, Green, & Isenstead), to biology (e.g., Flowerdew), to various general education courses (e.g., Babbitt; Johns; and Weigle & Nelson), and to courses in students' own major areas (e.g., Cargill, Cadman, & McGowan; Hall; Vann & Myers; and Xiao). These courses clearly are more demanding of teachers than writing courses that remain isolated and self-referential.

In their contributions, Weigle and Nelson warn that creating the type of course that can make good use of intellectual content to aid in language and writing development requires content knowledge on the part of the L2 writing teacher. Some time ago, Spack (1988) warned against writing teachers teaching disciplinary writing because we do not know enough about all the subject areas our students might want or need to write in. She is right, but if we doggedly refuse to learn anything about any areas that could be useful to students in helping them learn language and writing, then we will remain peripheral to the lives of our institutions, teaching service courses with no content. This is the very situation that Hunter and Morgan resisted in developing their L2 writing courses, with their focus on the public sphere, on the local community, and on the world beyond the writing class.

Pennycook (1997) has suggested that we think of ourselves not as writing and language teachers but as cultural workers, as people who know something about the world we live in beyond how to teach writing and language, and that we use that knowledge in our classes. Such courses would not infantalize L2 students. (See Schenke, 1996, for a critique of more typical and insipid ESL/EFL courses that attempt to use socially provocative topics, such as feminism, and end up vitiating these courses of any real intellectual content.)

Thus, a strong theme running through a number of these innovative programs is the importance of intellectually stimulating content—that students learn something as well as how to do something with what they have learned. We do not find here courses with short, high-interest readings used to stimulate writing that requires students to express simplistic, binary, for-or-against opinions on topics like censorship without any in-depth information on subjects. Instead, these settings take students—and teachers—seriously and assume that important, not trivial, intellectual work can go on in L2 writing classrooms.

In programs described in the chapters by Cargill, Cadman, and McGowan, and

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by Vann and Myers, graduate students draw on their developing disciplinary knowledge. In the Hirose and Williams chapters, undergraduate students do not explore just what they already know about a setting, a limit that would work to stunt their L2 intellectual growth and keep them at the childish level of having opinions on things they know little about; instead, they are pushed to learn more about their world however they can, including by gathering information in their L1, if necessary, to ensure that the sophistication of the information matches the intellectual level of the students in these academic settings. The value of having appropriately mature knowledge to work with in a L2 far outweighs presumed benefits of insisting that students work only in their L2 because it is good practice, no matter how contrived.

Finally, a number of these programs specifically have on their agendas the goal of linking students to the larger world, either by linking L2 students with other L2 English students to form communities of learning (e.g., Babbitt; Hall; and Smoke, Green, & Isenstead), with native-English-speaking (NS) students (e.g., Vann & Myers), with colleagues in their major areas (e.g., Cargill, Cadman, & McGowan), and with members of communities in which the students live and work and whose sociopolitical sphere they cohabit (e.g., Hunter & Morgan).

This volume begins with an exploration of EFL settings. Xiao focuses on the importation into Hong Kong of a North American-style writing center and the adaptations that were necessary to make it useful in its new home. Flowerdew explains how English teachers at an English-medium university in Oman worked with science faculty to link the two courses of study, resulting in more L2 writing in the science courses and instruction in disciplinary vocabulary and language functions in the English writing course. Hirose's writing course for English majors in Japan employs process-oriented innovations to develop both fluency and accuracy.

The rest of the volume deals with teaching L2 writing in settings where English is the primary public language. The major innovations described in Part 2 seek to build a sense of local or disciplinary community. Babbitt's program develops community among L2 English undergraduates by block scheduling their courses in their first semester. Johns's program first carefully links writing courses and general education courses and then culminates in L2 writing students' collaboration with students in an area high school. Vann and Myers's program sets up writing classes that allow L2 undergraduates and graduates to share their own cultural expertise with NS students. Cargill, Cadman, and McGowan discuss a program in Australia that integrates new graduate students more fully into their disciplinary areas.

Part 3 focuses on writing courses in which students use academic writing as a tool to examine their social, intellectual, and political environment or as a means of learning academic course content. Hunter and Morgan describe an L2 writing course in Canada that challenges students to explore their social world and its interactions with government and the news media. Williams's students critically analyze such familiar features of their lives as product advertisements using academic language and carefully guided analytical procedures that are difficult and new to them. Weigle and Nelson describe an unusual writing program in an intensive English setting in which students learn both U.S. history as content and how to write essay exams covering that content. Similarly, Smoke, Green, and Isenstead's linked course in the Latin and Greek roots of English uses that academic course content as the basis for the L2 writing course for matriculated L2 students in the United States.

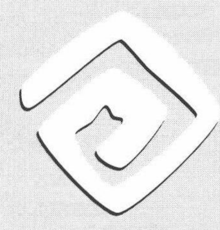
Finally, Hall describes the most radical structural innovation represented here—

an integrated reading, writing, and research course in L2 English in Australia in which the students themselves entirely decide on the course content, coming from their own disciplinary areas or from academic areas otherwise of interest to them.

We hope that this volume will contribute to a definition of academic writing by increasing our awareness both of the varying demands that academic writing places on L2 learners and teachers in different environments and of successful efforts to meet those demands. The purpose of these examinations of innovations in L2 academic writing is not to provide a template for programs or courses in other contexts but, rather, to inspire the generation of new ideas to meet local needs.

CONTRIBUTOR

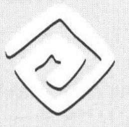
Ilona Leki is professor of English and director of ESL at the University of Tennessee. She is the author of *Understanding ESL Writers: A Guide for Teachers* (Boynton/Cook, 1992), *Academic English* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), and *Reading in the Composition Classroom* (with Joan Carson, Heinle & Heinle, 1993). She coedits (with Tony Silva) the *Journal of Second Language Writing*. Her research interests center around the development of academic literacy, and she was the 1996 recipient of the TESOL/Newbury House Distinguished Research Award.



PART 1

Exploring L2 Writing Program Innovations in EFL Settings

CHAPTER 1



The Writing Assistance Programme: A Writing Center With Hong Kong Characteristics

Maida Kennedy Xiao

INTRODUCTION

The Writing Assistance Programme (WAP) at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University is a second language (L2) writing program that has been developed along the lines of a first language (L1) writing center, but with characteristics that suit the EFL environment of Hong Kong. The WAP provides assistance to undergraduate EFL students in the form of one-to-one conferencing. Its aims are to help these students develop a critical awareness of their own writing and a richer understanding of writing processes and issues involved in constructing written academic text. The WAP offers an alternative to the product-oriented approach to writing that most Hong Kong students were taught in secondary school.

In this chapter, I describe the context that has influenced the development of the WAP. I examine the structure of WAP writing conferences and discuss approaches employed by WAP teachers to assist writers. I also discuss three features that distinguish the WAP from most North American L1 writing center models and suggest issues to consider when setting up similar L2 programs in different settings. In closing, I look at future developments planned for the WAP.

CONTEXT

Hong Kong Polytechnic University is located in the heart of the Kowloon district of Hong Kong, a city of 6.5 million people. Hong Kong was a British colony until July 1, 1997, when it became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC) under China's One-Country-Two-Systems policy. Most of its Chinese inhabitants (98% of the population) speak Cantonese, although Putonghua (i.e., Mandarin), the official language of the PRC, is growing in popularity. There is a widespread belief within the Hong Kong community that English standards should be maintained, even enhanced, if the region is to keep its position as a service center of banking, finance, commerce, insurance, and shipping, and its status within Asia and the international community as a bridge linking East and West. This belief is being reinforced by the economic challenge Hong Kong has felt from Singapore and Shanghai since the 1997 handover. Indeed, an English-proficient workforce is key for Hong Kong to keep and attract multinational companies.

Written English, and to a lesser extent spoken English, is used to varying degrees

within governmental, educational, industrial, and business sectors of the society. In recent years, however, there has been a growing debate within Hong Kong about the declining standards of English among secondary school graduates, although those countering charges of a fall in standards have argued that any perceived decline is due to greater numbers of students having access to higher levels of secondary and tertiary education than to any actual decline.

The Secondary School Experience

The majority of students entering the Hong Kong Polytechnic University have graduated from local Anglo-Chinese secondary schools that use English, in some cases only nominally, as the medium of instruction (a smaller portion of students come from Chinese-medium secondary schools). However, the amount and quality of secondary school English varies among students graduating from the more exclusive Band One schools, whose exit examination scores are better than those of the students graduating from the four less exclusive, higher band schools (Bands Two–Five). Indeed, it is rare for Band Five students to even reach the tertiary level. The government, recognizing the problems with the quality of English instruction and students' inadequate knowledge of English at the secondary school level, has reversed its previous promotion of English-medium instruction at the secondary school level in favor of a mother-tongue policy. However, the implementation of this policy, which affects only schools deemed incapable of teaching in English, has met with considerable resistance from various sectors of society. Parents, educators, and the media have expressed concerns that using Chinese as a medium of instruction in secondary education will disadvantage students attempting to matriculate into any of Hong Kong's primarily English-medium universities and may even make Chinese-medium students second class in comparison to their counterparts graduating from English-medium schools. Within the society as a whole there is also the belief that Hong Kong's special position as a bridge between the East and West will be weakened if English is downgraded.

Students graduating from Hong Kong's secondary schools are required to take the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) at the end of their fifth year (the equivalent of 10th or 11th grade in the United States and other Western countries). If they receive passing marks on enough of the HKCEE's various subject areas, including English, they have the opportunity to continue studying for the last 2 years of secondary school. During Years 6 and 7 of secondary school, students prepare for the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE), the entrance exam for university-level study. The HKALE assesses students' abilities in English, Chinese, and several additional subject areas. The Hong Kong Examinations Authority, which designs, administers, and marks the HKALE, sets a wide range of scores (e.g., A, B, C, D, E, F, and U, Unclassified). With a few rare exceptions, most Hong Kong Polytechnic University students matriculating into bachelor-level programs must receive an overall score of E or above in the Use of English component of the HKALE.

Although bachelor's students are required to attain an overall score of E or above on the Use of English component of the HKALE, individual scores on the five subcomponents of this subject area (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, and practical skills) may be as low as an F or U. In terms of the Test of English as a

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