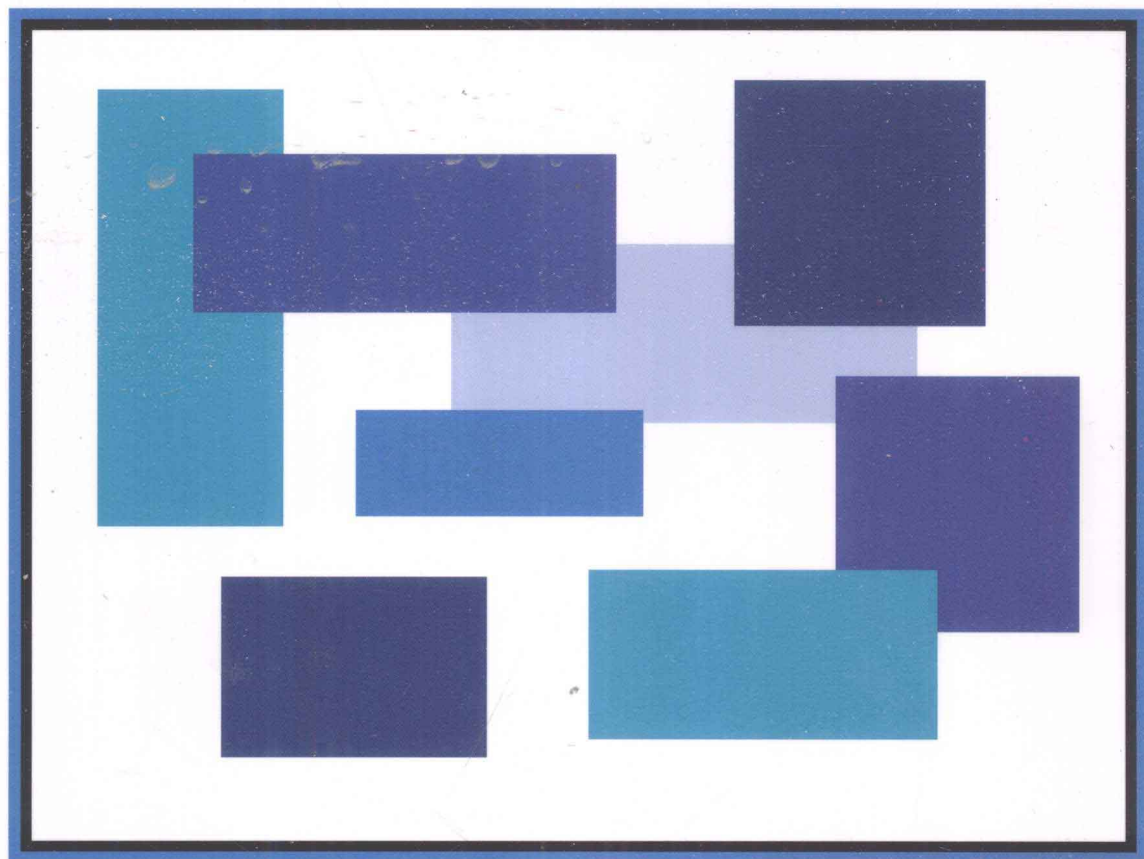# PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY COLLEGE ESL

Craig Machado, Series Editor

Volume 1:
Pedagogy, Programs, Curricula, and Assessment

Marilynn Spaventa, Editor

Perspectives on
Community College ESL Series

Pedagogy, Programs, Curricula, and Assessment

Edited by Marilynn Spaventa

Craig Machado, Series Editor

TESOL Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.

Series Editor's Preface

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I am pleased to introduce Perspectives on Community College ESL, a three-volume series designed to bring into practical focus a wide and diverse array of reflective work on ESL education in community college settings. The idea for this series initially grew out of numerous discussions and meetings I had with community college ESL practitioners at TESOL conventions and other venues. Because of the complexity and variety of ESL offered at community colleges, it was readily apparent that a series focused on this topic would undoubtedly be beneficial and useful. While community college interests and concerns within TESOL have found expression through other TESOL publications and events, no single one has been devoted entirely to this important educational milieu.

The project came more clearly into focus when I brought it before the TESOL Publications Committee, whose members helped me shape and refine its purpose and scope. I am deeply indebted to the committee, Past Chair Julian Edge, and, in particular, former TESOL Managing Editor Marilyn Kupetz, whose unflagging assistance, patience, and expertise carried me and the project forward.

Volume editors Marilynn Spaventa (*Pedagogy, Programs, Curricula, and Assessment*), Amy Blumenthal (*Students, Mission, and Advocacy*), and Jose Carmona (*Faculty, Administration, and the Working Environment*) have done an admirable job of evaluating manuscripts, working with contributors, and giving me timely and incisive comments and feedback. I could not have done this without them.

As the reader will note by glancing through each volume's content, this is an eclectic series—as it should be—drawing on the broad mission and constituencies that a community college must embrace. Topics range from the role of workforce ESL in an Oregon fishing community to training non-ESL faculty working with immigrants in a technical college in the Midwestern United States, from how the Smithsonian Institution provides an opportunity for ESL faculty and students to engage its museums as classrooms to what it means to be a blind ESL instructor working with sighted students.

Volume one, *Pedagogy, Programs, Curricula, and Assessment*, focuses on three main components of instruction: the kinds of courses offered, the organizational and programmatic structure through which courses are delivered, and

the means by which students are evaluated. The latter includes discussion of placement tools for students entering a given program; the kinds of evaluation tools used in specific courses (e.g., grades, tests, portfolios); and assessments, such as exit or proficiency tests, that are administered when students complete a program or a series of courses. ESL is taught in many types of community college settings, and it varies based on the nature and purpose of a program—credit or noncredit, academic or vocational, and so on. Reading the chapters in this volume, one is struck by the creativity, resourcefulness, determination, intelligence, and wit that the writers bring to bear in what are often challenging conditions.

Students, Mission, and Advocacy, volume two, considers the experiences and needs of the immigrants, refugees, and international students who pass through the doors of community colleges. It explores the college mission to educate and advocate for ESL students individually and as parts of distinct, diverse, vibrant, and changing communities. This volume also looks at who community college ESL students are, how they fit (or perhaps do not fit) into a college's overall mission, and the roles that ESL and other college profession-als play as educators and advocates. Contributors to this volume underscore the importance of building collaborative relationships among ESL programs and other college entities, and highlight the critical need for ESL educators to promote their students' welfare and success by helping to challenge and shape the college mission over time.

In response to the growing awareness of the difficulties that ESL practitio-ners face daily in making a viable living, volume three, *Faculty, Administration, and the Working Environment,* explores various aspects of the community college work environment in which ESL professionals function and interact. Given the large numbers of part-time ESL instructors, many of whom work multiple jobs in different programs at diverse institutions, it is more crucial than ever to understand the impact this state of affairs has on classroom effec-tiveness, professional standards, burnout, employee-employer relationships, and program management. This volume looks at workplace issues realistically and offers suggestions and strategies for improving the longstanding inequalities that have beset ESL education for some time.

The breadth and depth of the work presented in this series is a lasting reminder of all the accomplishments that community college ESL practitioners have made in terms of creative curricula, innovative program design and man-agement, successful collaboration across disciplines, and unwavering devotion to the betterment of their students' lives and livelihoods.

I hope the reader enjoys reading this series as much as I have enjoyed bring-ing it to fruition.

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Volume 1:
Pedagogy, Programs,
Curricula, and Assessment

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Marilynn Spaventa

The field of English as a second language (ESL) provides a mélange of organizational models to serve students with diverse vocational and academic goals in both credit and noncredit programs. Faculty and administrators design programs and curricula and select assessment instruments customized to the mission of their institutions and to serve the needs of their student populations. There is much for ESL professionals to learn from each other in a dynamic discipline, which is influenced as much by global as well as local events. The authors in this volume contribute their perspectives and personal experiences related to pedagogy, program organization, curricula, and assessment, providing the reader with theory and experience for reflection.

In the section on pedagogy, Venkatesh, Berman, Caballero, Carroll, and Gaines (chapter 1), from Montgomery College in Maryland, describe the insights gained from their participation in a Smithsonian Faculty Fellows Program and recommend application and replication by ESL faculty teaching near any museum or by accessing museums with the Internet. In chapter 2, Ramírez shares his personal journey as an instructor of language, examining very thoroughly the ideological basis for what occurs in the classroom through an instructor's choice of curriculum. He demonstrates that reflection can create profound change in the roles of instructor and student, affecting both curriculum and methodology.

The chapters related to programs, to no great surprise, demonstrate the diversity of structure and mission of ESL programs in community colleges. Allison (chapter 3) describes the evolution of an ESL program for Generation

1.5 students at Gainesville College in Georgia, a location that had not had an immigrant population. Babbitt (chapter 4) shows how students in Brooklyn, New York, benefit from learning communities, which result in greater persistence, more rapid entry into other academic courses, and an increased rate of graduation. Two chapters focus on vocational instruction: Lenhardt, Purcell, and Tyson (chapter 5) describe the development of a workplace-based bilingual program in the Pacific Northwest, and Thomas (chapter 6) details the daunting challenge of developing and implementing an ESL program for displaced workers in Texas within a very short time frame. Creativity and flexibility clearly remain prime character traits for ESL professionals.

In the section on curricula, Ayala and Curtis (chapter 7) focus on curriculum revision at Queen's University School of English in Ontario, Canada. The authors describe the process they undertook and make recommendations for administrators and instructors considering curricular revision. In a chapter focused on technology and ESL, Brutza and Hayes (chapter 8) describe their concerns and successes with using computer writing programs for ESL instruction. Thomsen (chapter 9) also focuses on writing as she details the development of an integrated skills writing project for immigrants in a vocational program, which provides students with skills applicable in future job searches. Finally, Lieske (chapter 10) takes readers inside a community college in Japan for a rare, insightful, and somewhat surprising view of English as a foreign language instruction.

The final section of this volume addresses issues of assessment, an area of ongoing interest, development, and research. Connell and O'Leary (chapter 11) describe the approach they took in developing student learning outcomes for their ESL courses. Machado and Solensky (chapter 12) explore many of the issues involved in shifting responsibility for providing accurate and efficient computerized placement for ESL students from the ESL department to the college's testing office. In the final chapter in the volume, Sheppard and Crandall (chapter 13) compare two programs in very distinct institutional settings, emphasizing the role of assessment in each program.

I hope that the experiences shared and lessons learned in these practical and thought-provoking articles provide new perspectives or, at the very least, raise new questions that are of value to readers. In closing, I extend my sincere appreciation to all of the authors who contributed to this exploration of the varied, interesting, and always evolving discipline of ESL in community colleges.

▪▪ CONTRIBUTOR

Marilynn Spaventa is dean of educational programs at Santa Barbara City College (SBCC) in California in the United States. She oversees the School of

Modern Languages, the Sciences and Mathematics Divisions, the Disabled Student Programs and Services, and the SBCC Online College. Before discovering community colleges, she taught ESL and trained teachers in more than six countries and proudly served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Korea. Along with her husband, she coauthored an ESL writing series and contributed to a grammar series.

PART 1

PEDAGOGY

A Funny Thing Happened to Me on the Way to the Museum: From Collaborative Inquiry to Transformative Pedagogy

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Usha Venkatesh, Michael Berman, Henry Caballero, Sherrie Carroll, and Judith Gaines

"So, what I get is not what I see?"

"No! What you get is what you make of what you see."

"And what do I see?"

"What someone wants you to see."

"So someone controls what I see, and I control what I make of it?"

"Precisely."

"What is that called?"

"Reading."

"Reading what?"

"Reading anything—including my face."

■■ FRAMING THE ISSUE

We, the authors of this chapter, Usha Venkatesh, Mike Berman, Henry Caballero, Sherrie Carroll, and Judith Gaines, teach English as a second language (ESL) at Montgomery College in Rockville, Maryland, in the United States. Montgomery College, Maryland's largest community college with three campuses, has a well-established ESL program for more than two thousand students from more than 170 counties. We are also members of a faculty cohort participating in a Smithsonian Faculty Fellows Program, which is a partnership between the community college and the Smithsonian Institution.

The fellows program enables the multidiscipline cohort to participate in a series of seminars in which museum curators discuss the curatorial process of a

particular exhibit and relate it to a theme chosen for each year. Faculty engage in critical discussions with the curators and then transform the curriculum in one or more of the courses they teach to include a museum visit as well as pedagogy emerging from their participation in the program. Although we experienced the program differently from our different positions at the college and in our own professional lives, there is overwhelming consensus among us regarding one outcome—the tremendous pedagogical implications of such a program and the wealth of teaching and learning opportunities provided by the use of museums as extended ESL classrooms.

In this chapter, we use excerpts from our individual narratives to tell a collective story of the Smithsonian partnership as a professional development model and describe the pedagogy generated by this professional development activity. We also look at how the pedagogy works in the classroom and discuss ways in which other community colleges may build collaborative partnerships with cultural institutions in their communities.

∷ NARRATIVE

A Museum/Community College Partnership

Why a partnership between a community college and a cultural institution? What happens for faculty during their fellowship year? What specific implications does this type of faculty professional development have for ESL faculty in higher education?

In 1997 Montgomery College and the Smithsonian embarked on a visionary project, joining resources and talents to establish the first partnership in the country between the Smithsonian Institution and a community college. Funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities Challenge Grant, the Smithsonian's Center for Museum Studies and the college's Paul Peck Humanities Institute created the Paul Peck Humanities Institute/Smithsonian Faculty Fellows Seminars, offering faculty at Montgomery the opportunity to participate as members of a community of scholars in a yearlong seminar on a single theme.

Each year since then, twelve to fifteen faculty members from different disciplines have participated in yearlong seminars covering a broad range of scholarly topics. Using the primary source materials of the Smithsonian complex of museums and working directly with scholars who are conducting research using museum resources, faculty pursue studies and new approaches to teaching and learning designed to provoke thought and action, inspire values, and develop new insights and knowledge.

In her narrative, Gaines, the current director of the Paul Peck Humanities Institute at Montgomery, offers the following reflection:

In 2003, I was appointed as director of the Montgomery College Paul Peck Humanities Institute (PPHI). With its mission to offer faculty, students, and the public programs designed to strengthen the teaching and learning of the humanities at Montgomery and in its larger community, the PPHI is a vibrant intellectual resource. Its centerpiece and treasure is its Smithsonian Faculty Fellows Program, a partnership between the Smithsonian Institution and Montgomery College to develop an innovative, yearlong seminar for Montgomery faculty (fellows). As a former fellow, I knew firsthand the tremendous opportunity for scholarly renewal and pedagogical growth the seminar offered faculty. Now as its director, I would begin to recognize my own commitment to the professional growth and development of my colleagues and, by extension, Montgomery College students.

Faculty apply for the fellowship for different reasons and with varying goals, as Venkatesh, the coordinator of the Faculty Fellows Program, notes,

> I came to the fellows program looking for a new way to extend and consolidate theories and practices that I had been working with and through in recent years.

In her narrative, Carroll recalls how being part of a cohort attracted her to the program:

> The theme was to be inclusion and would be centered on the upcoming *Brown v. Board of Education* exhibit. I was immediately seduced. I loved the theme . . . and yet, I was perhaps even more attracted to the experience that I could have. I loved the idea of being a part of a cohort of faculty who were both following the path of individual inquiry and supporting one another in the development of our pedagogical projects. My day-to-day work at the college, largely administrative, did not lend itself to these kinds of scholarly collaborations. In all honesty, it was this process, the fun I would have as part of a group of faculty going behind the scenes of the museum with the curators, which propelled me into the fellows program far more than the thought of the pedagogical product that I would create.

Caballero, in his narrative, notes the difference between the growth possible through this professional development model and those commonly available:

> Most professional development programs at our institution consist of workshops and seminars that an education major takes in graduate school to prepare for working as a professional educator, what I call the nuts and bolts of teaching (i.e., lesson planning, classroom management, teaching in a multicultural environment, assessment techniques, integrating technology, educational psychology). Although I attended these workshops with a plan to use what I learned, I rarely gained any "new" insights. I discovered that the Humanities Institute on our campus offered a unique professional development opportunity called the Smithsonian Fellowship. I immediately became interested in participating as a Smithsonian Fellow. Although I did not completely understand the work involved, I knew that the fellowship involved a one-year commitment with an obligation to incorporate museum visits in the curriculum. What I did not know was that this fellowship

would tremendously influence my teaching. During the second semester of the fellowship, my teaching paradigm was altered in a positive way.

ESL Teachers as Culture Brokers

As faculty engage in the seminars during the first semester of their fellowship, they begin to understand the structure of the museum as an educational institution, the curatorial process, and the complexities involved in *culture brokerage*. The organization of cultural institutions (e.g., museums) differs dramatically from the discipline-based scholarship model of higher education. While college offerings are organized departmentally to engage students in discipline-based knowledge, cultural institutions are places of self-initiated learning where ideas, information, and knowledge are available to be assimilated at will, with no prescribed sequence. Museums do see themselves as educational, and curators consider themselves to be part of academia. However, the freedoms and constraints imposed on this particular form of organization are very different from those that we, as academics, are used to. For example, the curator may or may not have the academic freedom to include or exclude materials used in the exhibit. Moreover, once the exhibit has been put together and opened up to the public, the curator, like an author and unlike a teacher, is not present to direct the course of interpretation. During the seminars, faculty interact with curators to discuss issues of representation, authenticity, authority, funding, external control, and so forth as they apply to the curatorial process. These discussions give the multidisciplinary faculty much on which to reflect as they begin to conceptualize their pedagogical projects.

Faculty also come to understand the role of curator as *culture broker.* In Kurin's (1997) book *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian* (a mainstay for the fellows), the author notes:

> Representations of peoples, culture, and institutions do not just happen. They are mediated, negotiated, and, yes, brokered through often complex processes with myriad challenges and constraints imposed by those involved, all of whom have their own interests and concerns. In the end, a series of decisions is made to represent some one, some place, some thing in a particular way. (p. 13)

He explains that while brokerage is not a term many professionals like to have applied to what they do because it somehow seems to cheapen their lofty goals, good brokering is, in fact, a difficult, complex, and necessary means of representation. He suggests that there are many models of representation, ranging from the extractive model in which the scholar takes elements of culture from others, studies them, writes about them, and displays them, to a "flea market" approach in which anyone who in some way qualifies as being from or of the culture gets "a table, or stage, or room, or lectern, or home page into or onto which he or she can put out the stuff of the culture" (p. 19).