

# Writing across Culture and Language

INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH ELL WRITERS IN THE ELA CLASSROOM



CHRISTINA ORTMEIER-HOOPER

Principles  
**in Practice**

TEACHING ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Dear Reader,

As a former high school teacher, I remember the frustration I felt when the gap between Research (and that is, by the way, how I always thought of it: Research with a capital *R*) and my own practice seemed too wide to ever cross. Research studies—those sterile reports written by professional and university researchers—often seemed so out of touch with the issues that most concerned me when I walked into my classroom every day. These studies were easy to ignore, in part because they were so distant from my experiences and in part because I had no one to help me see how that research could impact my everyday practice.

Although research has come a long way since then, as more and more teachers take up classroom-based inquiry, this gap between research and practice unfortunately still exists. Quite frankly, it's hard for even the most committed classroom teachers to pick up a research article or book, figure out how that research might apply to their classroom, convince their administrators that a new way of teaching is called for, and put it into practice. While most good teachers instinctively know that there is something to be gained from reading research, who realistically has the time or energy for it?

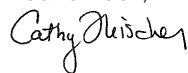
That gap informs the thinking behind this book imprint. Called Principles in Practice, the imprint publishes books that look carefully at the research-based principles and policies developed by NCTE and put those policies to the test in actual classrooms. The imprint naturally arises from one of the missions of NCTE: to develop policy for English language arts teachers. Over the years, many NCTE members have joined committees and commissions to study particular issues of concern to literacy educators. Their work has resulted in a variety of reports, research briefs, and policy statements designed both to inform teachers and to be used in lobbying efforts to create policy changes at the local, state, and national levels (reports that are available on NCTE's website, [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)).

Through this imprint, we are creating collections of books specifically designed to translate those research briefs and policy statements into classroom-based practice. The goal behind these books is to familiarize teachers with the issues behind certain concerns, lay out NCTE's policies on those issues, provide resources from research studies to support those policies, and—most of all—make those policies come alive for teacher-readers.

This book is part of the sixth series in the imprint, a series that focuses on teaching English language learners. Each book in this series focuses on a different aspect of this important topic and is organized in a similar way: immersing you first in the research principles surrounding the topic (as laid out by the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners*) and then taking you into actual classrooms, teacher discussions, and student work to see how the principles play out. Each book closes with a teacher-friendly annotated bibliography.

Good teaching *is* connected to strong research. We hope that these books help you continue the good teaching that you're doing, think hard about ways to adapt and adjust your practice, and grow even stronger in the vital work you do with kids every day.

Best of luck,



Cathy Fleischer

# Principles in Practice

The Principles in Practice imprint offers teachers concrete illustrations of effective classroom practices based in NCTE research briefs and policy statements. Each book discusses the research on a specific topic, links the research to an NCTE brief or policy statement, and then demonstrates how those principles come alive in practice: by showcasing actual classroom practices that demonstrate the policies in action; by talking about research in practical, teacher-friendly language; and by offering teachers possibilities for rethinking their own practices in light of the ideas presented in the books. Books within the imprint are grouped in strands, each strand focused on a significant topic of interest.

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*Real-World Literacies: Disciplinary Teaching in the High School Classroom* (2014) Heather Lattimer  
*Doing and Making Authentic Literacies* (2014) Linda Denstaedt, Laura Jane Roop, and Stephen Best

### **Reading in Today's Classrooms Strand**

*Connected Reading: Teaching Adolescent Readers in a Digital World* (2015) Kristen Hawley Turner and Troy Hicks

*Digital Reading: What's Essential in Grades 3–8* (2015) William L. Bass II and Franki Sibberson

*Teaching Reading with YA Literature: Complex Texts, Complex Lives* (2016) Jennifer Buehler

### **Teaching English Language Learners Strand**

*Beyond "Teaching to the Test": Rethinking Accountability and Assessment for English Language Learners* (2017) Betsy Gilliland and Shannon Pella

*Community Literacies en Confianza: Learning from Bilingual After-School Programs* (2017) Steven Alvarez

*Understanding Language: Supporting ELL Students in Responsive ELA Classrooms* (2017) Melinda J. McBee Orzulak

*Writing across Culture and Language: Inclusive Strategies for Working with ELL Writers in the ELA Classroom* (2017) Christina Ortmeier-Hooper

# Writing across Culture and Language

Inclusive Strategies for Working with  
ELL Writers in the ELA Classroom

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For Richard (1961–2017) and Andrea, my brother-in-law and sister,  
two teachers who inspire curiosity and a love of learning in their  
students. While I was in the final stages of this project, Richard lost  
his battle with cancer. He was a devoted teacher to his students, and  
he made me a better person and teacher. This book is dedicated to  
his memory and to his teaching legacy, which continually reminds  
so many of us that every student can shine. Rest in peace. You are  
missed more than you could ever imagine.





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# NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)

*Prepared by the NCTE ELL Task Force*

*Approved by the NCTE Executive Committee, April 2006*

This position paper is designed to address the knowledge and skills mainstream teachers need to have in order to develop effective curricula that engage English language learners, develop their academic skills, and help them negotiate their identities as bilingual learners. More specifically, this paper addresses the language and literacy needs of these learners as they participate and learn in English-medium classes. NCTE has made clear bilingual students' right to maintain their native languages (see "On Affirming the CCCC 'Students' Right to Their Own Language'" 2003). Thus, this paper addresses ways teachers can help these students develop English as well as ways they can support their students' bilingualism. In the United States bilingual learners, more commonly referred to as English language learners, are defined as students who know a language other than English and are learning English. Students' abilities range from being non-English speakers to being fully proficient. The recommendations in this paper apply to all of them.

## **Context**

The National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) reported that in 2003–04 there were over five million English language learners (ELLs) in schools in the United States (NCELA, 2004). In the last ten years the ELL population has grown 65%, and the diversity of those students continues to challenge teachers and schools. Although 82% of ELLs in the United States are native Spanish speakers, Hopstock and Stephenson (2003) found that school districts identified over 350 different first languages for their second language learners.

Federal, state, and local policies have addressed the education of bilingual learners by implementing different types of programs. Different models of bilingual education, English as a Second Language, English immersion, and integration into mainstream classes, sometimes referred to as submersion, are among the most common approaches. Preferences for the types of programs have changed over time, responding to demographic and political pressures. (For a historical and descriptive summary, see NCTE's "Position Statement on Issues in ESL and Bilingual Education"; Brisk, 2006; Crawford, 2004.)

The best way to educate bilingual learners has been at the center of much controversy. Research points to the advantage of quality bilingual programs (Greene, 1997; Ramirez, 1992; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Willig, 1985) and the benefits of ESL instruction when language is taught through content (Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E., 1998; Marcia, 2000).

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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

For a variety of reasons, however, the majority of ELLs find themselves in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students (Barron & Menken, 2002; Kindler, 2002). Although improving the education of ELLs has been proposed as a pressing national educational priority (Waxman & Téllez, 2002), many teachers are not adequately prepared to work with a linguistically diverse student population (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Fillmore & Snow, 2002; Gándara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; Menken & Antunez, 2001; Nieto, 2003).

Teachers working to better meet the needs of linguistically diverse students need support. NCTE encourages English teachers to collaborate and work closely with ESL and bilingual teaching professionals, who can offer classroom support, instructional advice, and general insights into second language acquisition. School administrators should support and encourage teachers to attend workshops and professional conferences that regularly offer sessions on bilingual learners, particularly in the areas of reading and writing. Schools should also consider seeking professional development for their teachers from neighboring colleges.

In turn, colleges and universities providing teacher education should offer all preservice teachers, as well as teachers pursuing advanced degree work, preparation in teaching linguistically diverse learners in their future classrooms. Coursework should be offered on second language writing and reading, and on second language acquisition, as well as on culture, and should be encouraged for all teachers.

### **Who Are the Students?**

Bilingual students differ in various ways, including level of oral English proficiency, literacy ability in both the heritage language and English, and cultural backgrounds. English language learners born in the United States often develop conversational language abilities in English but lack academic language proficiency. Newcomers, on the other hand, need to develop both conversational and academic English. Education previous to entering U.S. schools helps determine students' literacy levels in their native language. Some learners may have age-/grade-level skills, while others have limited or no literacy because of the quality of previous schooling, interrupted schooling due to wars or migration, and other circumstances (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Given the wide range of English language learners and their backgrounds, it is important that all teachers take the time to learn about their students, particularly in terms of their literacy histories.

Immigrant students and the children of immigrants in the United States come from many cultural backgrounds. The background knowledge English learners bring to school greatly affects their performance. For this reason, teachers of English language learners should be sure to build background for content lessons rather than assuming that bilingual students come with the same background knowledge as mainstream students.

### **Teaching Bilingual Learners in Mainstream Classrooms**

This section specifically addresses teaching language, reading, and writing, as well as the specific kinds of academic literacy that are often a part of most English and language arts

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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

curricula. Although English language arts teachers have literacy as the focus of their teaching, many of these suggestions are useful for teachers working in the content areas as well. To acquire academic content through English, English language learners need to learn English. The academic language that students need in the different content areas differs, and students need scaffolding to help them to learn both the English language and the necessary content. For English language learners, teachers need to consider content objectives as well as English language development objectives.

Bilinguals need three types of knowledge to become literate in a second language. They need to know the second language; they need to know literacy; and they need world knowledge (Bernhardt, 1991). The sections below list key ideas for helping English language learners develop academic English proficiency. More detailed information on the topics covered in this section can be obtained from the topical bibliography compiled as part of this project.

To teach bilingual learners, teachers must get to know their learners.

### **Knowledge of the Students**

Knowledge of the students is key to good teaching. Because teachers relate to students both as learners and as children or adolescents, teachers must establish how they will address these two types of relationships, what they need to know about their students, and how they will acquire this knowledge. The teacher-learner relationship implies involvement between teachers and students around subject matter and language and literacy proficiency in both languages. Adult-child relationships are more personal and should include the family. Focusing on both types of relationships bridges the gap between school and the world outside it, a gap that is especially important for many bilingual students whose world differs greatly from school.

### **Teaching Language**

Second language learners need to develop academic proficiency in English to master content-area subjects. Teachers can provide effective instruction for these students by:

- Recognizing that second language acquisition is a gradual developmental process and is built on students' knowledge and skill in their native language;
- Providing authentic opportunities to use language in a nonthreatening environment;
- Teaching key vocabulary connected with the topic of the lesson;
- Teaching academic oral language in the context of various content areas;
- Teaching text- and sentence-level grammar in context to help students understand the structure and style of the English language;
- Teaching the specific features of language students need to communicate in social as well as academic contexts.

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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

### **Teaching Literacy: Reading**

Bilingual students also need to learn to read and write effectively in order to succeed in school.

Teachers can support English language learners' literacy development by:

- Introducing classroom reading materials that are culturally relevant;
- Connecting the readings with the students' background knowledge and experiences;
- Encouraging students to discuss the readings, including the cultural dimensions of the text;
- Having students read a more accessible text on the topic before reading the assigned text;
- Asking families to read with students a version in the heritage language;
- Replacing discrete skill exercises and drills with many opportunities to read;
- Providing opportunities for silent reading in either the students' first language or in English;
- Reading aloud frequently to allow students to become familiar with and appreciate the sounds and structures of written language;
- Reading aloud while students have access to the text to facilitate connecting oral and written modalities;
- Stimulating students' content knowledge of the text before introducing the text;
- Teaching language features, such as text structure, vocabulary, and text- and sentence-level grammar to facilitate comprehension of the text;
- Recognizing that first and second language growth increases with abundant reading and writing.

Support reading comprehension by:

- Relating the topic to the cultural experiences of the students;
- “Front loading” comprehension via a walk through the text or a preview of the main ideas, and other strategies that prepare students for the topic of the text;
- Having students read a more accessible text on the topic before reading the assigned text;
- Asking families to read with students a version in the heritage language;
- Doing pre-reading activities that elicit discussion of the topic;
- Teaching key vocabulary essential for the topic;
- Recognizing that experiences in writing can be used to clarify understanding of reading.

### **Teaching Literacy: Writing**

Writing well in English is often the most difficult skill for English language learners to master. Many English language learners are still acquiring vocabulary and syntactic competence in their writing. Students may show varying degrees of acquisition, and not all second language writers will have the same difficulties or challenges. Teachers should be aware



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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

that English language learners may not be familiar with terminology and routines often associated with writing instruction in the United States, including writing process, drafting, revision, editing, workshop, conference, audience, purpose, or genre. Furthermore, certain elements of discourse, particularly in terms of audience and persuasion, may differ across cultural contexts. The same is true for textual borrowing and plagiarism. The CCCC Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers is a useful resource for all teachers of writing to examine.

Teachers can provide instructional support for English language learners in their writing by:

- Providing a nurturing environment for writing;
- Introducing cooperative, collaborative writing activities which promote discussion;
- Encouraging contributions from all students, and promoting peer interaction to support learning;
- Replacing drills and single-response exercises with time for writing practice;
- Providing frequent meaningful opportunities for students to generate their own texts;
- Designing writing assignments for a variety of audiences, purposes, and genres, and scaffolding the writing instruction;
- Providing models of well-organized papers for the class. Teachers should consider glossing sample papers with comments that point to the specific aspects of the paper that make it well written;
- Offering comments on the strength of the paper, in order to indicate areas where the student is meeting expectations;
- Making comments explicit and clear (both in written response and in oral responses). Teachers should consider beginning feedback with global comments (content and ideas, organization, thesis) and then move on to more local concerns (or mechanical errors) when student writers are more confident with the content of their draft;
- Giving more than one suggestion for change—so that students still maintain control of their writing;
- Not assuming that every learner understands how to cite sources or what plagiarism is. Teachers should consider talking openly about citation and plagiarism in class, exploring the cultural values that are implicit in the rules of plagiarism and textual borrowing, and noting that not all cultures ascribe to the same rules and guidelines. Students should be provided with strategies for avoiding plagiarism.

### Teaching Language and Content

The best way to help students learn both English and the knowledge of school subjects is to teach language through content. This should not replace reading and writing instruction in English, nor study of literature and grammar. There are three key reasons to do this:

1. **Students get both language and content.**

Research has shown that students can learn English and subject matter content material

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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

at the same time. Students don't need to delay the study of science or literature until they reach high levels of English. Instead, they can learn both simultaneously. Given the time limitations older students face, it is crucial that classes provide them with both academic content-area knowledge and academic English.

### 2. **Language is kept in its natural context.**

When teachers teach science in English, students learn science terms as they study biology or chemistry. The vocabulary occurs naturally as students read and discuss science texts.

### 3. **Students have reasons to use language for real purposes.**

The primary purpose of school is to help students develop the knowledge of different academic disciplines. When academic content is presented in English, students focus on the main purpose of schooling: learning science, math, social studies, or literature. In the process, they also learn English.

## Selecting Materials

- Choose a variety of texts around a theme.
- Choose texts at different levels of difficulty.
- Choose reading and writing materials that represent the cultures of the students in the class.
- When possible, include texts in the native languages of the ELLs in the class. The following considerations should be used as a guide for choosing texts that support bilingual learners:
  - Materials should include both literature and informational texts.
  - Materials should include culturally relevant texts.
  - Authentic materials should be written to inform or entertain, not to teach a grammar point or a letter-sound correspondence.
  - The language of the text should be natural.
  - If translated, the translation should be good language.
  - Materials should include predictable text for emergent readers.
  - Materials should include texts with nonlinguistic cues that support comprehension (For a more comprehensive checklist, see Freeman, Y. S., & Freeman, D. E., 2002; Freeman, D. E., & Freeman, Y. S., 2004.)

## Low-Level Literacy Immigrant Students

Late-arrival immigrant and refugee students with low literacy skills have been found to benefit from Newcomer programs or Welcome Centers designed for 1–3 semesters of high school (Boyson & Short, 2003; Schnur, 1999; Short, 2002). The focus is to help students acquire beginning English skills and guide students' acculturation to the U.S. school system before enrollment in regular ESL language support programs or content-area classrooms. The integration of such programs in high school English departments should be encouraged.

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## The Role of English Teachers in Educating ELLs

### Conclusion

As the number of bilingual learners in mainstream classes increases, it becomes even more important for mainstream teachers to use effective practices to engage these students so that they can acquire the academic English and the content-area knowledge they need for school success. The guidelines offered here are designed as initial suggestions for teachers to follow. However, we recognize that all teachers need much more. Teachers need continued support and professional development to enable all their students, including their bilingual students, to succeed.

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For more resources to support English language learners, see <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/teacherseducatingell>.

# Statement of Terminology and Glossary

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As authors of the various books in the Teaching English Language Learners strand of the NCTE Principles in Practice (PIP) imprint, we have made a concerted effort to use consistent terminology in these volumes. All of us have thought long and hard about the ways in which we label and describe bilingual and ELL students and the programs that often provide these students with additional support. Even so, readers will notice some variation in terms used to describe students, classrooms, and teaching practices. The concern over terminology is part of a long-standing discussion and trends in the labeling of these students, as well as of the fields that conduct research on teachers and students working across languages to teach and learn English. Often the shifting among terms leads to confusion and contention for teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and policymakers.

To address this confusion and tension, we begin each book in this strand with a glossary of common terms and acronyms that are part of current discussions about meeting the needs of these students in English language arts classrooms and beyond. For many readers, the terms themselves and the ongoing shift to new terms can be alienating, the jargon dividing readers into insiders and outsiders. But often the shift in terms has a great deal to do with both policy and issues of identity for students. For example, up until the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, most educational documents referred to these students as *bilingual* or *ESL*, both of which acknowledge that English is a second language and that a student has a first language as well.

The term *English language learner* was adopted with NCLB and brought into our schools and the larger public discourse. In fact, in 2002 the US Department of Education renamed the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs. It became the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students, now identified simply as the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). The change indicated a shift away from acknowledging students' home languages or bilingual abilities. Close to two decades later, the term *English language learner* remains prominent in educational policy and in many textbooks geared toward teachers and teacher educators. Its prominence and familiarity in the literature makes it an accessible way to talk about these students. Yet, as we have heard from many students through the years, the term *English language learner* can also be limiting. As one student asked, "When do I stop being an English language learner and get to just be an English language user?" The term also works against efforts to acknowledge the competencies and linguistically sophisticated talents these students have as translators, bilingual speakers, and cross-cultural negotiators.

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## Statement of Terminology and Glossary

In these PIP volumes, we use the term *English language learner* as a way to reach out to readers who see and hear this term regularly used in their schools, in their hallways, and in other helpful books in the field. However, some of us also use the terms *multilingual* or *bilingual* in order to encourage a discussion of these young people not simply as novice English learners but as individuals with linguistic and academic competencies they have gained from bilingual/multilingual experiences and literacies.

### Glossary

**Bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual:** These terms refer to the ability to use (i.e., speak, write, and/or read) multiple languages. For many ELL-designated students in US schools, English is actually the third or fourth language they have learned, making *bilingual* not necessarily an accurate term.

**Emergent bilingual:** This term has been proposed as a more appropriate term than *LEP* or *ELL*, because it points to possibilities of developing bilingualism rather than focusing on language limits or deficiencies (García, 2009).

**English as a foreign language (EFL):** Refers to non-native English-speaking students who are learning English in a country where English is not the primary language.

**English as an international language (EIL) or English as a lingua franca (ELF):** These are terms used to refer to global conceptions of English, or English used for communication between members of various nations.

**English as a second language (ESL):** Readers may be most familiar with this term because it has been used as an overarching term for students, programs, and/or a field of study. Currently the term usually refers to programs of instruction (i.e., study of English in an English-speaking country); however, *ESL* was used in the past to refer to English language learning students.

**English language learner (ELL):** In keeping with the terminology used in the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*, this PIP strand employs the term *ELL*, which is commonly used in secondary schools as the short form of *English language learner*. The term refers to a complex, heterogeneous range of students who are in the process of learning English.

**English learner (EL):** This is the preferred term of the California Department of Education (and, increasingly, other states). California is the state with the largest number and percentage of emergent bilingual students enrolled in public schools. Over the past twenty years, California has moved from *LEP* to *ELL* and, most recently, from *ELL* to *EL*.

**First language (L1) and second language (L2):** *L1* has been used to refer to students' "mother tongue" or "home language" as they learn additional languages (referred to as *L2*).

**Generation 1.5:** This term, originally used in higher education, often refers to students who have been long-term residents in the United States but who were born abroad (al-

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## Statement of Terminology and Glossary

though the term is sometimes also used to refer to US-born children of recent immigrants). The designation of 1.5 describes their feelings of being culturally between first- and second-generation immigrants; they are often fluent in spoken English but may still be working to command aspects of written English, especially academic writing. As long-term residents, these students may reject *ESL* as a term that has been used to refer to recent immigrants to the United States.

**Limited English proficiency (LEP):** This abbreviation may be used in some educational contexts to refer to a designation used by the US Department of Education. Many scholars see this as a deficit term because of its focus on subtractive language (language that implies a deficiency) under a monolingual assumption of proficiency.

**Long-term English language learner (LTELL):** Currently in use in some states, this term refers to K–12 students who have been enrolled in US schools for many years and continue to be stuck with the ELL designation long past the time it should take for redesignation. Like Generation 1.5 students, LTELLs may have spent most if not all of their education in US schools. For a variety of reasons, including family mobility, inconsistent educational programs, and personal reasons, they have not had opportunities to learn academic language sufficiently to pass English language proficiency tests and other measures of proficiency for redesignation (Olsen, 2010).

**Mainstream:** This term is increasingly antiquated due to shifting demographics in the United States. In practice, it often refers to nonremedial, nonhonors, nonsheltered classes and programs. Sometimes it is used to refer to native or monolingual English speakers as a norm; changing demographics, however, mean that schools increasingly have a majority of culturally and linguistically diverse students, so it's been argued that a linguistically diverse classroom is the “New Mainstream” (Enright, 2011).

**Monolingual:** This term is used to refer to people who speak only one language, although often this label masks speakers' fluent use of multiple dialects, or variations, of English—an issue of particular concern when working with culturally diverse students who use other varieties of English (such as Hawai'i Pidgin or African American Vernacular) in their lives outside of school. The monolingual English label can mask these diverse students' need to learn academic English just as much as their immigrant classmates do. Much of what this PIP strand discusses is relevant to students who utilize multiple varieties of English; teachers can support these students by acknowledging their multilingualism and helping them learn to use English for academic and other purposes.

**Native or non-native English speakers (NES, NNES):** Some materials contrast native English speakers (NES) with non-native English speakers (NNES). As with *monolingual*, the term *native speaker* is increasingly unclear, given how many long-term ELLs speak English fluently without a “foreign” accent and yet technically have another world language as their home or first language.

**Newcomer:** Some school districts have separate one-year programs for “newcomers,” or students who are newly arrived in the United States, in which students learn not just “surviv-

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## Statement of Terminology and Glossary

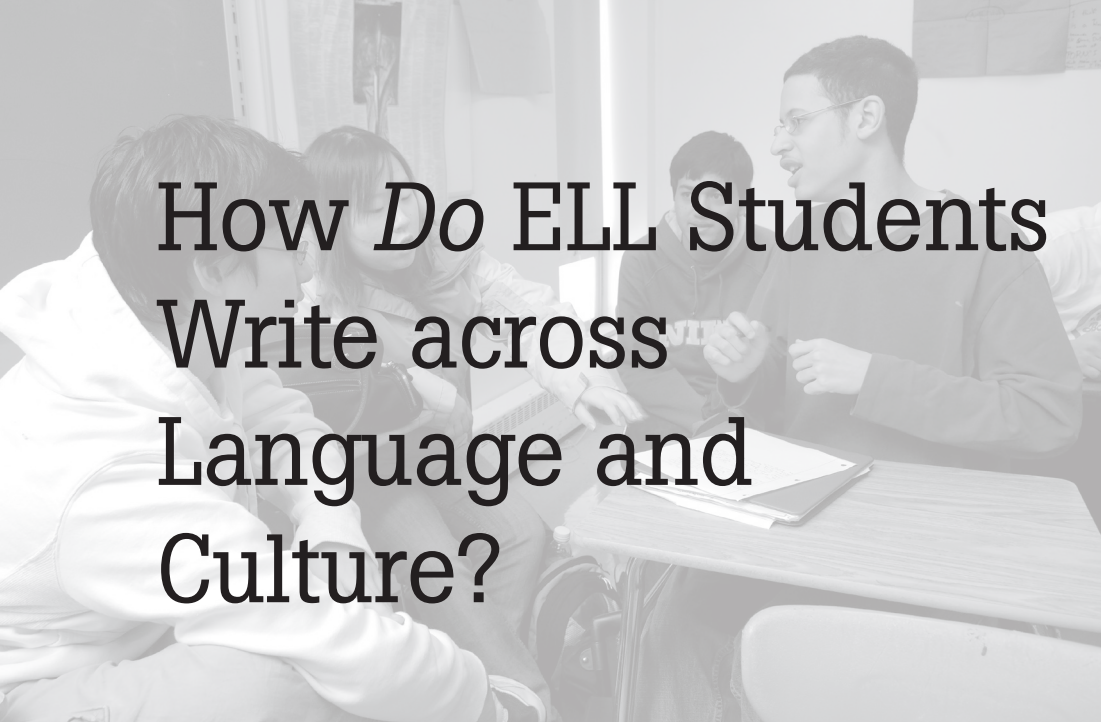
al” English, but also how school works in the United States. As the position statement discusses, it’s sometimes argued that newcomer programs benefit “low-level literacy immigrant students” and/or students with interrupted formal education who may have limited literacy in their first language (L1). Other newcomers may be fully literate in L1, especially by high school, and may or may not benefit from being isolated from the mainstream curriculum. For older students, the challenge is to move away from “low-level” ideas of literacy assessment that may discount the literacies of these students.

**Resident or local bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual:** These terms are sometimes used to refer to students who reside in the United States (in contrast to those who are on student visas). Resident students may or may not be US citizens, others may not have permanent resident status, while still others may not have immigration documentation at all.

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# How *Do* ELL Students Write across Language and Culture?

## Down the Hall

**I**t is Monday morning, and the students have streamed into the classroom. On the walls are world maps and pictures of flags from various countries: Iraq, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Somalia, Mexico, Guatemala, China, Nepal. The desks are placed in rows, each one numbered. Some students talk in the doorway, then slowly move toward their desks. The melodies of Haitian Creole, Spanish, Nepalese, and Arabic echo from the hallways into the classroom as the students move into their seats. In the front row, a lone young student from China pulls out a handheld translator. At the front of the classroom is a podium, a whiteboard, and a bulletin board filled with vocabulary—a word wall built by teacher and students featuring academic language and terms from social studies, science classrooms, and English language arts (ELA) classrooms. Though this is an English as a second language (ESL) classroom, each of these students has an ELA teacher down the hall, and each one will take ELA classes throughout his or her high school career.

Each of the students attends class in this room once a day. Some may have additional support in a study hall with an aide or teacher specializing in teaching English language learners (ELLs) who can help them navigate their homework in the content areas. The ELL teacher would tell you that many people tend to place all language learners into a single box or profile, to describe them in terms of “limited English proficiency” (LEP), or question how English proficiency impedes their learning. But she knows there are vast differences and experiences among these students. She is careful to look for the surprises and the literacy strengths, to not judge prematurely—especially during a newcomer’s silent period. She is always searching for clues into their literacy pasts and their current language experiences in order to build on past knowledge and out-of-school literacies. Many of these ELL students become more adept at English reading and writing over time, and they will test out of ELL support. Some will continue to struggle for years to pass the English writing proficiency exam. Almost all of them will continue to need support in writing to one degree or another because it’s the most difficult language skill to master.

In this school, the ELA teacher and the ESL teacher seldom cross paths, despite the fact that they share similar teaching objectives around reading, writing, and language development. Common planning periods are rare, and those that exist are often taken up by other activities and priorities. Teachers here know that they share the same students, and often engage in brief check-ins during hallway duty to see how one student or another is fairing in the mainstream ELA classroom. Quick tips and insights during these moments happen quite often, but sustained conversations on teaching writing to ELLs and multilinguals is not the norm.

I know this reality well. I began my teaching career as a certified high school ELA and ELL teacher, wearing both hats over the course of the day. My first teaching experiences were as an ELA teacher in a summer program for students labeled “at-risk” in an urban US school district. I went on to teach high school ELA and ELL, spending half my day with juniors in classes on composition, American literature, and poetry and the other half working with ELL students down the hall. I then became a full-time ELL teacher specializing in language arts, reading, and writing. I developed curricula for my ELLs that aimed to dovetail with ELA standards. As a teacher of writing, I was fortunate to learn my craft from Tom Romano, Thomas Newkirk, and Don Graves, and through reading the works of Nancie Atwell, George Hillocks, and Linda Rief. My English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) training had also been rich, filled with the works of bilingual educators such as Guadalupe Valdés, Yvonne Freeman, and Carole Edelsky. But I’ll be honest. When I began teaching, there was very little information about how

to work with ELL students specifically on writing. Though I was fortunate to take a methods course dedicated to the teaching of writing in ELA courses, the coursework and readings did not prepare me for the obstacles that my ELL students would face when it came to writing. Likewise, when I started teaching, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) courses in curriculum, instruction, and assessment often relegated writing to the last of the four language skills; reading, listening, and speaking took precedence, along with teaching vocabulary and grammar.

A great deal has changed since I began teaching, from the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and other state-designed internal standards closely aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). In addition, a recognized field of second language writing emerged in the 1990s. Today, we have research and academic journals focused solely on multilingual writers and writing, though most of these continue to look almost exclusively at university-level students or students studying English in foreign countries. Still, today in the United States, we have some teacher education programs offering courses and workshops on teaching multilingual writers; others make TESOL coursework a part of degree and licensure requirements. These changes are part of more general interest in student writing and the teaching of writing in our schools—for all students in general and for multilingual students in particular. In part, the interest in writing is one element of a larger educational and economic trend. Over the past two decades, we have seen writing expand in terms of its stature in the curriculum, its place in educational assessments, and its currency within the workplace.

### *The Purpose of This Book*

Today, there are approximately 4.6 million English language learners in US schools, and that number is expected to rise over the next decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). By 2025, it is estimated that more than 25 percent of public school students will be English language learners or multilinguals (US Department of Education, 2006). We know that ELA teachers will serve as the primary writing teacher for many of these students at one point or another during their secondary school years. We also realize that writing well is a threshold skill—for all students (National Commission on Writing, 2004; Applebee & Langer, 2011). The ability to write well can open doors for students; it creates opportunities in the workplace, can determine entrance into higher education and scholarship programs, and can even determine access within a given high school's upper-level academic tracks.

This book aims to provide examples and research-based practices for ELA teachers working with ELL and multilingual writers. It is aligned with specific writing instruction recommendations outlined in the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*. Specifically, the book develops concrete understandings and strategies for teachers on the following concepts detailed in the *Position Paper's* "Teaching Literacy: Writing" section (the *Position Paper* is reprinted in the front matter of this book):

- Second language students have varying degrees of language acquisition and writing backgrounds. Certain elements of discourse, conventions of a genre, and writing expectations vary across cultural contexts.
- To generate their own texts, ELL and multilingual students need rich instruction and meaningful writing opportunities (e.g., teachers can provide scaffolded and inquiry-based writing instruction; replace single-response exercises with time for meaningful writing practice; and design inclusive and varied writing assignments).
- Teachers should foster meaningful interactions and discussions around writing for ELLs (e.g., introducing cooperative, collaborative writing activities that promote discussion; encouraging contributions from all students; and encouraging peer interaction to support learning).
- ELL writers require explicit and clear teacher response, benchmarks and modeling, and more attentive systems of feedback (e.g., teachers can develop new strategies for using models of well-organized papers in class; refine techniques for responding to ELLs' texts; develop best practices for error correction; and create classroom practices that build confidence and competency in ELL writers).
- Late-arrival immigrants and refugees with low-literacy and/or interrupted schooling may have specific challenges that require additional strategies and support.

To meet these goals, I draw on theory, research, and practical applications from the fields of TESOL and second language writing. The book highlights connections between theory and classroom application, with particular attention to classroom implementation and learners' experiences. Since adolescent ELL writers' perspectives can remain hidden from their ELA teachers, this book also draws attention to students' experiences and perspectives. I recognize that struggles with English writing often mask the communicative strengths of many intelligent, bright, linguistically and culturally diverse students; this, in turn, hinders them from achieving higher levels of academic advancement. For these reasons, this book challenges deficit models of ELL writers and offers techniques that help teachers identify their students' strengths and develop inclusive research-based writing practices that are helpful to all student writers.

## Why Focus on Writing?

Writing well acts as a gate-opener (and gatekeeper) to the major access points for students aiming to do well in secondary schools and beyond. Teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators use student writing samples and tests to determine which students are invited into honors, AP, and other upper-level academic tracks. Writing résumés and professional materials such as workplace correspondence, cover letters, and job applications opens doors to employment. College and scholarship applications ask students to write essays that help determine college acceptance, merit, and financial need. Students' essays help determine which colleges accept students, which majors they can enter, and how much money in aid a student may receive (Wight, 2017). Once college is completed, writing continues to be important; employers report that writing matters in the workplace. In discussions of hiring and promotion trends, employers note that those who write well tend to move up more quickly, have higher salaries, gain leadership roles, and in general receive more opportunities (National Commission on Writing, 2004). Quite simply, writing well is a way of opening doors and gaining access to a number of financial, professional, personal, and academic opportunities.

For thousands of ELL and multilingual students, however, writing closes doors. Research tells us that for these students, writing will be the greatest area of struggle and lack of confidence (Chiang & Schmida, 2006; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013; Kanno & Kangas, 2014; Ruecker, 2015). Research also has shown that writing well *in a second language* is the most difficult cognitive and language skill for multilingual and ELL students to master (Harklau, 1994). I emphasize “in a second language” because the process, cognitive demands, and identity issues inherent in writing in a second language are unique and very different from writing in one's first language (Silva, 1993).

## Writing in a Second Language (L2) or Even Third Language (L3)

### What Have Been Your Own Experiences with Writing in a Foreign Language?

In workshops across the country, I often ask teachers to respond to a prompt that asks them to write in a language other than English. Over the seven minutes of writing time, they begin to understand—on visceral, intellectual, and emotional levels—the kinds of challenges their ELL students face. As they reflect on the experience, teachers say the following:

- “I stopped writing. I resented feeling like I couldn't express myself.”
- “I switched topics—I couldn't write in response to the prompt you gave. I didn't have the vocabulary, so I wrote about the weather, my cat, etc.”

- “I kept crossing things out. I struggled to get the verb tense right. I knew it was wrong, and I just couldn’t keep writing. I felt like I was constantly stopping and starting. I felt like I was always interrupting myself. I only wrote two sentences.”
- “I gave up.”
- “I started writing in French, but then I started using English words to fill in the blanks, the words that I couldn’t remember. I kept confusing word order, too.”
- “What I wrote is so much shorter than what I usually can write. I just felt so silenced. Every word seems to take so long to get on paper.”
- “I never started. I took French for four years, and I have no idea or confidence in writing it. It felt impossible. I kept looking around at other people’s papers. Everyone else seemed to be writing and having no troubles.”
- “I loved this activity. I grew up speaking two languages. I rarely get a chance to express myself in my home language. As I started writing, I had a flood of memories from my childhood.”
- “I didn’t want you to see it. I felt so unintelligent. Silenced, frustrated, angry, dumb, ashamed.”

### Writing in a Second Language Is Unique

Writing in a first language, which is the norm for many monolingual students and ELA teachers in the United States, differs from the cognitive and academic demands of writing in a second language, which is the challenge for most ELL students in ELA classrooms. Most ELA teachers I’ve worked with over the years seem to intuitively understand the difficulty their multilingual/ELL students face when writing in English. They know that it must be difficult. They see many of their students struggle. They may hark back to memories of studying abroad or taking a test in a Spanish class many years earlier. But when asked what exactly makes it so difficult or what might make it easier, most teachers aren’t sure. So let’s begin with this: what exactly makes writing in a second language so difficult?

Recently, I heard a person hypothesize that if English language learners had stronger English vocabulary, knew the right grammatical structures, and knew the rules and punctuation, they could write well. He rationalized that if we just taught certain building blocks—in his opinion, grammar and vocabulary—and these were in place, then writing in a second language would be easy, almost like a kind of plug-and-play game that anyone could master. Plug in the right word, add the right verb tense, and *voilà!* But writing well in a second language requires much more; it’s not only about learning a set of technical tools, rules, or vocabulary.

First, let's consider the demands of writing more generally. The cognitive demands of writing are many: getting ideas into words and on paper, understanding a given genre and its conventions, thinking through word choices and mechanics, trying to determine whether the writing is "right" or if the reader will like it, and so on. These demands affect most of our students, regardless of their language backgrounds. In my twenty years of teaching writing at all levels from middle school to high school to college, I've noticed that most students—and even some teachers—see writing as a daunting task, sometimes a risky and possibly embarrassing one. Even those adults and students who are considered successful and talented writers have moments of severe doubt or hesitancy about the words they commit to the page. Now imagine all those cognitive demands doubled—quadrupled—as you navigate creative and academic writing tasks in a second or third language: translating, cross-checking word choices and verb forms, having the word or thought in one language but being unable to find the equivalent meaning or even depth of your ideas in your second language, losing track of one idea as you chase down the language for another. ELL students often tell me that nothing makes them feel as unintelligent and juvenile as having to write in English. On one recent occasion, a student pointed to his beautiful script in Arabic, noting the fluidity with which he wrote passage after passage of poetry and prose, and then compared it to his stilted English block letters, the few short sentences uneven and full of crossed-out words: "It looks like a first grader [wrote it]. In English, I feel that way. So I write when I have to, that is it."

## **The Research**

### **Students' Writing Process**

In 1993, Tony Silva, a leading second language writing researcher, examined more than twenty years of studies on students writing in their second languages, looking for common findings and common student concerns. The research overwhelmingly found that writing in a second language:

- Takes more time.
- Is more cognitively demanding, requiring the writer to shift across languages, new vocabulary or language rules, and cultural expectations of writing. Often these shifts are recursive, with writers drawing on past experiences with language and writing in order to push forward with the new text in front of them.
- Is more labor-intensive. ELL and multilingual writers may spend more time searching for words and developing their thoughts on the page. For some students whose first language uses a different alphabet or logographic system

(e.g., Arabic, Chinese), the process of writing out English words or even typing them can be less fluid, and they feel as though they are writing in starts and stops. Arabic texts, for example, are read from right to left, and they are written in a cursive script. In addition, no distinctions are made between upper- and lowercase.

Many of these factors add up, complicate confidence, and are incredibly time-consuming. Most ELL writers find they are often facing the clock and putting in double and triple the amount of work time their peers take to complete English compositions, responses, and reports. For student writers, the cost of this additional time is evident in fewer revisions, a “What’s next?” approach to writing, and a hesitancy to explore beyond set forms or graphic organizers.

Many teachers comment that the compositions of ELL writers tend to be much shorter than those of their monolingual English-speaking peers. In part, this is a direct outcome of the time and labor factors already mentioned. Many ELL writers note that they feel stilted and emotionally disrupted by not being able to express themselves in English as fully as they can in their first language. This frustration is often exacerbated when ELL writers have few strategies for how to “do” revision, especially with more content- and audience-based revisions and planning.

### “Good Writing” and the Role of Culture

How do teachers decide what “good writing” is? We have rubrics, standards, samples of past student papers, the input of our colleagues, writing samples from testing and textbook publishers, and the instruction of our own teachers and professors over the years. We also recognize good writing from our reading—books, essays, poetry, op-ed pieces in national papers, magazines, plays both written and performed, pieces we’ve read through school or for pleasure, and those we’ve shared with our students. These experiences have all shaped our tastes and the ways we judge a piece of writing: effective or ineffective, organized or disorganized, clear or imprecise, evocative or off-putting, beautiful or plain.

But these tastes and barometers of good writing are not universal. Rarely do we as writing teachers think about how some of these tastes and expectations are shaped and how many of our expectations about genre, form, citation, use of the personal, use of research or secondary sources, among other conventions, are driven by our national and cultural contexts. In many ways, our expectations as teachers reflect a unique American vantage point and educational experience.

We don’t often think about the ways in which we define good writing as culturally influenced. However, structures and expectations for “good writing”



or “good argument” or “a good narrative” can differ from one nation to the next (Hinds, 1987; Matsuda, 1997; Connor, 2011). For example, Li (2005) studied teachers’ responses to student writing, comparing ranking and comments from both Chinese teachers and English teachers. She found that the variations in what was deemed “good writing” were often based on cultural expectations and literacy experiences in the teachers’ first language (including past schooling, past feedback that teachers had received from their teachers and professors, and oral and written language uses).

Why is this so? Research on contrastive rhetoric suggests that other countries and cultures may value different rhetorical strategies and patterns from those valued in the United States, particularly for genres such as argument or narrative (Connor, 1996; Matsuda 1997). The problem is that we often teach these genre expectations as though they were universal. But readers’ expectations are not universal. Our expectations as readers are bound up in our cultures, our own educational experiences, and the texts we’ve seen. In some cultures, for example, it’s assumed that readers will take more responsibility in extracting information and understanding the writer’s intent. A study conducted by George Mason University found that many international students were “confused about why their teachers in the U.S. placed so much emphasis on structuring a paper, including having an explicit thesis and topic sentences. For many, this confusion stems from their experiences writing within ‘reader-responsible’ cultures” (Zawacki, Hajabbasi, Habib, & Das, 2007).

In an influential study, John Hinds (1987) defined “reader-responsible” languages as those that place the burden on readers for extracting meaning from the text. In some Asian cultures, for instance, readers expect and are comfortable with a certain level of ambiguity or even a delayed thesis; readers learn to move inductively through a text. In contrast, American academic writing tends to reflect a more writer-responsible culture, in which English-speaking readers learn, and teachers teach, that “good writing” is explicit and direct. In practice, this kind of writer-responsible style pushes us to expect the writer’s thesis or focus to appear earlier in a text. Similarly, this American academic style encourages teachers to teach that topic sentences should focus paragraphs and that each paragraph should include certain types of evidence. Even rules about citation, plagiarism, and textual ownership are influenced by culture, and these vary even among traditionally English-dominant countries (Currie, 1998). In our work with student writers, we rarely acknowledge the differences between English in closely linked countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, differences that are evident in the varying expectations around citation, grammar, idioms, and spelling.

My own multilingual students have often noted the strangeness of American readers' expectations of writers, pointing out that the United States seems to require a high level of clarity and forthrightness in order to understand a text. They are often confused by the extensive attention paid to citation and style rules. They may have learned different patterns of organization for cohesive and persuasive arguments. Even multilingual students who have not formally studied writing in their home languages may still be influenced by storytelling traditions and patterns of argument they see used in their communities, read in home language poetry and novels, and hear among extended family.

The reality is that many English teachers are influenced by a "myth of linguistic homogeneity," a general assumption that all students are English dominant and that certain standards and conventions about English writing, or writing more generally, are universal (Matsuda, 1997, 2006). When English teachers encounter student writing that doesn't seem to follow US-based cultural norms or conventions, they may judge these student essays as off-putting or lacking clarity. We often fail to see a student's work through the lens of alternative rhetorical strategies, or, worse, we jump to the conclusion that the student's thinking is unclear, rather than considering that the student writer is drawing on other cultural ideas of "good writing," "good argument," and "good storytelling."

At the same time, it's important to acknowledge that people aren't simply products of their nations. A whole range of past experiences with reading, writing, and literacy in general influences multilingual student writers. In other words, we can't just assume that all Asian or all Latino/a students, for example, write in the same way. Cultures within countries are not homogeneous; regional differences are common. Previous education, and even the ways in which national education policy impact curricula or testing, can also play a large role in how students approach writing tasks. Matsuda (1997, 2006) has suggested that we as teachers consider our own assumptions and biases before we read the texts of ELL/multilingual writers, noting that we need to find a bidirectional middle ground, mediated by working with the student and the student's texts. We should consider how the students' previous language, writing, and educational experiences may impact their ideas about good writing. We also need to become more accepting of the different rhetorical approaches and traditions that our multilingual students bring to their work. At the same time, Matsuda recommends that we turn a mirror on ourselves as readers. We need to consider and reflect on how our own language background, writing experiences, and previous teachers and training impact how we read and respond to the texts of multilingual writers. When reading and evaluating the effectiveness of

a multilingual student's writing, we can often be more open to that student's ideas, innovations, effective language, and rhetorical strengths if we are cognizant that many of our judgments about good writing are bound up in a specific culture and taste, influenced by our educational systems and our own past literacy experiences.

### **Recognizing the Sociocultural Factors of ELL Writing**

Writing is always socially situated. So are writers, especially immigrant, refugee, and resident bilingual students in our schools. Linguist Ken Hyland (2009) explains that writing in a second language involves studying linguistic features, but he also notes the importance of cultural aspects of writing practices like those discussed previously. In addition, he identifies the sociopolitical and identity factors that shape multilingual students' perceptions, motivations, classroom participation, and English writing experiences. Our multilingual students may be wrestling with writing in English or figuring out an assignment, but at the same time they may also be asking themselves: Who am I? How do I want to be seen by my peers? By my friends? By my teachers? By my parents? Do I want to share my language background? What does my writing tell others about me? Does it make me feel like an insider or an outsider? Which social groups do I want to be a part of? How do my school and classroom performance make my peers or friends see me? Identity factors are particularly salient when teachers are working with adolescent writers, who are often dealing with the complexities of figuring out who they are, who they want to be grouped with, and how they want to be seen by peers, teachers, and family members. And students are often shifting their answers to these questions or finding themselves in conflict about how they want to be seen and understood by the various stakeholders in their lives. For many multilingual teenagers, this identity work occurs at the same time that they are developing their literacies, and that reality can make writing and learning to write in English much more complicated (Ortmeier-Hooper & Enright, 2011).

Likewise, many bilingual and immigrant students may be attuned to contentious political and community discussions on English-only and immigration policies. Race, language, and competing definitions of "Who is American?" permeate their communities, television and radio programs, and the broader US cultural and political landscape. Students who are aware of these discussions often feel like targets in their towns, cities, and schools if they dare to speak, reveal their accents, or use their home languages. In some situations and places, their sense of being targeted is quite real. For example, in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, bilingual and refugee students in many schools faced an uptick in brazen bul-

lying, along with subtle and not-so-subtle threats. Teachers told stories of refugee children being taunted, asked by their peers if they were terrorists. In some cities, graffiti written on the sides of walls suggested that immigrants should go home. In one city, police reports revealed that graffiti was found written on the side of an apartment door that housed a young immigrant family, telling them to leave or they would be harmed. Such incidents create a very real sense of fear, and at times antipathy among students to using the English language. They question why they should join a language community that seems so hostile or inhospitable. Still other students respond to these discussions and incidents by becoming politically active, and with the help of a supportive community and teachers, they learn to use their skills in English and other languages to speak out against xenophobic speech and policies that are hurtful to their friends and families.

In terms of school identities, multilingual students may interpret their linguistic diversity as a strength or as something that singles them out. Some may love having opportunities to share stories from home cultures and the countries with which they are familiar. Others will try to blend in with the monolingual, English-speaking kids in the room. Students may resent being classified only in terms of their language and classrooms if their teachers box them into ELL categories in ways that nullify their other achievements and identities: cheerleader, honor society member, yearbook editor, actor, soccer player, student journalist, poet.

How adolescents negotiate these kinds of identity situations is often directly or indirectly linked to their efforts in the writing classroom. Some ELLs may be reluctant to take part in peer review or share their writing with peers, even those who are friends. Others may resent using English because it builds a kind of linguistic wall between them and members of their families. Learning something about the kinds of identity negotiations that are shaping multilingual students can help teachers make decisions about how to approach these student writers and writing instruction. For instance, literacy researcher Danling Fu (2009) notes that ELL writers may find that returning to strategies they have used for writing in their first language (whether writing personally, online, or in their first language schools) can be helpful when writing in English.

### Cycles of Inopportunity

The difficulties of writing in a second language are further compounded by lack of practice and lack of sustained training in how to develop a piece of writing. The writing practice that ELLs and multilinguals receive in US classrooms and the writing curriculum they experience are often incredibly narrow. Studies comparing

ELL students' experiences in lower-level and upper-level academic tracks in ELA and science classrooms have found that ELL students stuck in lower-level tracks have few opportunities for sustained and meaningful writing; instead, their writing experiences are often limited to graphic organizers, short paragraph practice, single-sentence responses, worksheets, and only the most basic of writing instruction (Fu, 1995; Enright, 2010; Enright & Gilliland, 2011; Ruecker, 2015). As I have argued elsewhere, opportunities for ELL writers to pursue rich, meaningful, project-based or inquiry-based writing instruction and sustained writing practice are often inadequate or cut short due to competing curricular demands (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). In addition, many teachers have not been trained to work with the writing of ELL/multilingual students (Larsen, 2013).

Given how little practice these students have been given and how few writing strategies they have been taught, it's no wonder they lack confidence and try to hide from writing activities. Some of my former students have identified shorter compositions as a writing strategy, noting that when they write shorter compositions, there are few chances for error. Some ELL writers rationalize that they can correct their writing better by keeping it contained to a certain length, using simpler sentence and paragraph structures, and not taking chances with vocabulary and word choice. Students rationalize (often correctly) that these strategies contain fewer risks, and they are less likely to be marked down for errors. Students correctly think through the cost-benefit analysis:

more errors = lower grades

lower grades = fewer opportunities to advance

low grades + failing to succeed = no college

In this light, we can sympathize with students' efforts to avoid writing or, at the very least, to escape a writing assignment with the fewest red marks possible.

### **Meeting the Needs of ELL Writers: Adding to Your Repertoire as an ELA/Writing Teacher and Why It Matters**

In 2011, Kerry Enright, a teacher educator from the University of California, Davis, wrote that the "new mainstream" classroom in the twenty-first century includes more and more linguistically and culturally diverse students. Diversity is becoming the norm. As Randy Bomer (2005), former president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), noted, "We [as ELA teachers] can no longer be content with saying, 'the ESL teacher will take care of all those kids'" (16)

Because the writing needs of ELL students are unique, mainstream teachers will need to add to their instructional repertoire in order to help students make definitive strides as writers within these demographically diverse and linguistically

rich “new mainstream” classrooms. Some of what I discuss in this book will look familiar to many ELA teachers, but certain strategies embedded in these practices have particular benefits for the ELL/multilingual writers in the room. Other suggestions and practices are more overtly specific to these writers. Teacher response and assessment is one such area. Overall, though, I approach best practices for working with ELL and multilingual writers from a universal design approach, meaning that most of what I have learned over the years about working with diverse learners has led to better practices for all of my student writers, monolingual and multilingual.

What is at stake? In most US high schools, very few multilingual and ELL students gain access to upper-level college preparatory classes. Even if ELL students are exited from ELL programs or pass language proficiency exams to enter mainstream classes, they often find themselves placed in lower-level academic tracks. Research confirms that ELLs often have limited opportunities to participate in high-level academic curricula in US schools (Enright & Gilliland, 2011; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Even when these courses are available through an open application process, many multilingual students are too intimidated to apply, worried about a lack of support and often discouraged by teachers and guidance counselors. Many English language learners are just grateful to get enough ELA credits to graduate from high school. And many ELLs and their parents wrongly assume that all ELA courses are considered equal in the selection process for colleges and universities.

Some teachers and administrators assume that if students can graduate, they will find success and more remedial services at local community colleges, considering them like a thirteenth year of high school. But the statistics on these students’ attrition rates at two-year colleges are alarming. Difficulties and lack of confidence with college-level reading and writing are often part of the problem. Overall, recent studies based on statistical analyses suggest that ELLs’ access to postsecondary education is limited in comparison to that of their non-ELL peers. Kanno and Kangas (2014) report that in 2006, only 19 percent of ELLs advanced to four-year institutions. Given the high stakes around multilingual writing and ELL adolescents, we have to begin to translate research into classroom practice.

In the following chapters, I build on our knowledge of ELL/multilingual students and writing in order to consider several important components to working with these writers in English classrooms. Throughout, I share stories of students I’ve worked with through my research and teaching. I consider the challenges teachers face as they try to improve instruction, engagement, and student writing, and I also offer evidence-based strategies for responding to and evaluating multilingual writers and their texts. In particular, I am fortunate to have worked closely

with teachers as we explored and enacted many of the techniques and strategies discussed in this book. Mrs. Keller,<sup>1</sup> an English and ELL teacher, is one such educator; her classroom is featured as an ongoing example of some of the strategies and methods shared in this volume. The activities featuring Mrs. Keller took place in urban high school classrooms with high numbers of linguistically diverse writers, ages fourteen to eighteen. I explore the possibilities that Mrs. Keller, the other teachers, and I gained from focusing on the strengths of ELL/multilingual student writers. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 then explore best practices for developing explicit writing strategies and instructional techniques. Specifically, these chapters look at ways to design assignments (Chapter 3), methods for teaching writing explicitly (Chapter 4), and approaches to responding to ELL writers and texts (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, I look more broadly at assessment practices, considering what is fair and equitable assessment for multilingual writers. Finally, in Chapter 7, I connect this work to issues of social justice, calling on this work as a way to change the cycle of inopportunity.

But before we get to those more hands-on examples, Chapter 2 begins with a focus on globalization and new trends in 21st century literacies, both of which are causing fundamental shifts in our perceptions about writing, readers, English users, and multilingual students.

A note as you delve into the next chapters: You'll have seen already in this chapter that I use many acronyms and terms when referring to multilingual students—a variation in naming that is prevalent across the field. The authors of the four books in the *Principles in Practice* imprint concerning teaching English language learners have worked together to create some consistency in naming and some explanation of what we mean by the terms. See the statement of terminology and glossary on pages xix–xxii for definitions of some of the most current terms.

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# Teaching English Language Learners

## **(adapted from the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners [ELLs]*)**

What knowledge and skills do mainstream teachers need in order to develop effective curricula that engage English language learners, develop their academic skills, and help them negotiate their identities as bilingual learners? This position paper addresses the language and literacy needs of these learners as they participate and learn in mainstream ELA classes. Specifically, it addresses ways teachers can help these students develop English as well as ways they can support their students' bilingualism.

The growing population of English language learners in our schools and the diversity of these students continue to challenge teachers. Federal, state, and local policies have addressed the education of bilingual learners by implementing different types of programs. Still, for a variety of reasons, the majority of ELLs find themselves in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students. Although improving the education of ELLs has been proposed as a pressing national educational priority, many teachers are not adequately prepared to work with a linguistically diverse student population.

### **Connected to a strong research base, the position paper offers approaches to teaching that center on:**

- Knowledge of Students
- Teaching Language
- Teaching Literacy: Reading
- Teaching Literacy: Writing
- Teaching Language and Content
- Selecting Materials



Imagine being asked to write an essay in a language you don't know well or at all, to have to express yourself—your knowledge and analysis—grammatically and clearly in, say, three to five pages. How is *your* Spanish, your Urdu, your Hmong?

This is what teachers ask their ELL and multilingual students to do every day in middle and high school, especially in English classes, leading to expectations both too great and too small. Teachers often resort to worksheets and grammar drills that don't produce good writing or allow these students to tap in to their first language assets and strengths. Writing well is a primary door-opener to success in secondary school, college, and the workplace; it's also the most difficult language skill to master. Add writing in a second language to the mix, and the task difficulty is magnified.

In *Writing across Culture and Language*, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper challenges deficit models of ELL and multilingual writers and offers techniques to help teachers identify their students' strengths and develop inclusive research-based writing practices that are helpful to all students. Her approach, aligned with specific writing instruction recommendations outlined in the *NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs)*, connects theory to classroom application, with a focus on writing instruction, response, and assessment for ELL and multilingual students. Through rich examples of these writers and their writing practices, along with "best practices" input from classroom teachers, this book provides accessible explanations of second language writing theory and pedagogy in teacher-friendly language, concrete suggestions for the classroom, guiding questions to support discussion, and an annotated list of resources.

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