

Practical Approaches to Teaching Writing in Mixed (L1/L2) Classrooms

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MATSOL 2014: Refresh • Reflect • Renew

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Overview of Presentation

- **Introduction:**
Context, Classes, Teachers, and Learners
- **Intervention 1:**
WR “X”—Experimental Mediated L1/L2 Integration
- **Intervention 2:**
“We Are All ESL Teachers”—Ongoing Teacher Training
- **Conclusions:**
Current Dilemmas, Future Directions

Introduction: Context, Classes, Teachers, and Learners

- **General WR100 Classes Fall 2013: 123**
- **WR ESL Classes Fall 2013**
 - WR100ESL: 12
 - WR098: 19
 - WR097: 21
- **General Full Time Faculty:36**
- **ESL Full Time Faculty: 7**
- **International Freshman Student Population : 20.6%**
 - Half of those are Chinese

Intervention 1: WR “X,” Experimental Mediated L1/L2 Integration

- Integrates L1 and L2 students across two sections
- Fosters a multicultural, global perspective
- Creates opportunities for meaningful interactions with theme-based discussions, field trips, and projects (e.g., “Toxic Boston: Understanding Pollution Where We Live”)
- Exploits the resources of hidden context within language
- Promotes cultural understandings between native and non-native speakers of English, letting students explore BU as a global university
- Exposes general writing instructors to ESL-trained teachers, methods, activities, and principles

Pedagogical Goals

- Find a fresh pedagogical approach to mixed classrooms
- Create a more level playing field for L2 learners
- Answer the following questions:
 - How can L2 students be better served in terms of their interactions with L1 peers?
 - How can L2 students help L1 students discover the nuances of English that seem transparent to and therefore go unnoticed by native speakers?

Objectives

- Offer a creative approach to cultivating academic writing skills of L1 and L2 students in mixed classrooms
- Enhance what L1 and L2 students have to offer one another through meaningful interactions and transfer of linguistic and rhetorical skills
- Create a level playing field through social media
- Use student-tailored feedback, peer editing, and presentations to exploit the resources of the mixed population

Course Goals

- craft substantive, motivated, balanced academic arguments
- write clear, correct, coherent prose
- read with understanding and engagement
- plan, draft, and revise efficiently and effectively
- evaluate and improve reading and writing processes
- respond productively to the writing of others
- express and converse thoughtfully about complex ideas

Example Lesson Plans

- Peer-Editing (Pairing L1/L2 Students)
- Required self-edit as homework
 - **Part 1:** Please read and evaluate your introduction. Answer the following question as specifically as you can.
 - Is there enough context? Explain.
 - Is there a well-established problem?
 - Do you see the significance?
 - Circle the transitions between the common ground, destabilizing question and significance. Do they correctly signal to the reader what comes next?
 - Does the claim answer or address the problem created in the introduction?
 - Look at your syntax and grammar. Circle and correct your mistakes. Be on the lookout for subject-verb agreement, tense shift, and pronoun agreement errors. Also be careful of word order as well as word choice.
 - **Part 2:** Look at your answers and list possible changes.
 - **Part 3:** Revise. Bring both drafts to class, to discuss the changes.

Example Lesson Plans: Grammar & Syntax

- **Sentences from both L1 and L2 papers presented to class**
- **Groups of four/L1 and L2 students collaborate to correct them.**
- **Examples:**
 - Although Zinsser makes a strong argument, but his points need explanation.
 - For most students who experience social pressure double their risk of failure.
 - Impressionist's painters believed in focusing on ordinary subjects, capturing the effects of light on these subjects, and to use short brushstrokes.
 - However, one can clearly see the benefits that Richard will attain by listening to his father outweigh his hatred for college, but simply because everything that he will discover and understand in college will help him become a successful man in the future with a well-paying job.
- **Goals: Both populations engage in a discussion of grammar and style within the context of student work.**

“Action Research” Framework and Questions:

- **If you could ask an American student anything, what would it be and why?**
- **If you could ask a Chinese student anything, what would it be and why?**
- **Promote meaningful discussion on:**
 - Classroom culture for both populations
 - Cultural behaviors both inside and outside the classroom
 - Understanding of the different cultural approaches to writing arguments

Discoveries

- Classroom culture creates misunderstanding and potential obstacles to the interaction of L1 and L2 learners.
- Cross-population cultural discussions are essential (classroom culture, different cultural approaches to writing arguments) and allow learners to understand each other better.
- Cultural discussions demonstrate to both L1 and L2 learners what the other has to offer within the classroom setting, an understanding vital for the success of any mixed classroom.

Challenges

- Provide ways to meet the grammar and syntactic needs of both populations within mixed writing classes
- Find more ways of contextualizing course context that engages both populations
- Find ways to maximize mixed-population peer review that benefits both L1 and L2 students

Intervention 2: “We Are All ESL Teachers”—Teacher Training

Surface-Level Problems:

- complaints over “those” students; “us” vs. “them” mentality

Deeper-Level Problems:

- fear/resistance to change; perceived lack of (metalinguistic) competence
 - *“I don’t know grammar! When I was hired [as a general composition instructor], I was told I didn’t have to teach grammar!”*

Proposed Solution: “Helping Instructors Help All Our WR 100 and WR 150 Students”

Phase 1: Six “Transfer of ESL Knowledge” workshops offered April-December 2013

- Responding to ESL Writing: Words, Sentences, and Grammar
- Peer Review and Workshops in Mixed Classes
- Academic Classroom Culture and Our Chinese Students
- Panel Discussion: Facilitating Class Participation Among ESL Students
- Grading: Evaluating ESL Essays in WR 100 and 150
- Plagiarism and the ESL Student

Example of Workshop Goals—Responding to ESL Writing: Words, Sentences, and Grammar

- Distinguishing between ESL and non-ESL errors
- Distinguishing between less serious and more serious ESL errors
- Deciding when to refer ESL students to intensive tutoring
- Deciding which errors to ignore on drafts and which to address
- Balancing feedback between sentence-level errors and larger concerns
- Offering students specific strategies for finding and correcting their errors

Example of workshop activities— analysis of excerpt from student prose:

Sen is great writer. He can explain and analyze one of the unsolved problems in five thousands words. His analysis is wonderful and logical. However, both one hundred percent perfect person and one hundred percent perfect thing don't exist. Sen, the Noble prize winner can still make mistakes. In Sen's article part four, as a Chinese, I found some mistakes. "Several experts have noted that recently Chinese leaders have tended, on the whole, to reduce the emphasis on equality for women;....But this fact, while important, does not explain why..."(Sen part4) Although China has the traditional bias on women, I have never heard about our presidents said "Neglect women because they are not important." in public. Moreover, Sen only said "several experts have noted", and he didn't provide the source of this piece of information. There was no evidence showed Chinese leaders had said such words.

Example of workshop principles—Peer Review and Workshops in Mixed Classes

- **Things you can do the class before the workshop:**
 1. Decide on specific, doable goals for workshop and focus students.
 2. Review paragraphs/essays ahead of time or in the beginning of class.
 3. Work on grammar before the workshop (by email).
 4. Consider pairs vs. groups (more chance to talk, fewer pages to read).
 5. Plan pairs/groups intentionally.
 6. Avoid high reading loads during class time.

- **Things you can do at the beginning of the workshop:**
 1. (Re)focus students and reinforce the goals of workshop.
 2. Give students individual self-reflective work while you skim/assess/divide.

- **Things you can do during the workshop:**
 1. Be active in the workshop.
 2. Break up a workshop with mini lessons.
 3. Switch groups midway through so students get varied feedback.
 4. Refocus particular pairs or individuals.

Positive Results of Training Sessions:

- More positive feelings on the part of general faculty who attended
 - Less overwhelmed
 - Less isolated
 - Better equipped to help students
- More positive feelings on the part of ESL faculty
 - Not as marginalized—more contact with general faculty
 - More highly valued—sought out as “experts”

Objections to Workshops:

- From faculty who attended the sessions:
 - “A successful peer review session is when I can go out and get a cup of coffee during the class—students shouldn’t need me there.”
 - “I use groups, not pairs. I’ve always used groups of three—why should I change?”
 - “I set the peer review groups in September and don’t change them all semester long. Usually students really hit it off with their groupmates.”
 - “This is all great, but can’t you tell me something a little more *ESL*? What does the research say about this?”
- From faculty who did not attend the sessions:
 - “Oh, you had a workshop? There’s so much traffic on the faculty listserv I didn’t see the notice about it.”
 - “I have too much to do, too many papers to grade—I can’t go to a one-hour workshop!”
 - “‘Workshops’ sound too intimidating. Do I need to do homework before? Are you going to talk to me about ESL ‘research’? It all sounds too serious!”

Responding to Challenges: From Complaining to Training?

- Creating an anonymous online survey on Fall workshops
 - “Discussion Group” vs. “Workshop”
 - Same time weekly vs. different times twice a month
- Piggybacking onto existing efforts/energy
 - Program-wide excitement about Action Research
 - General faculty discussion of “ESL issues”

Phase 2: Five ESL “Discussion Group” meetings offered February-March 2014

- Corrective Feedback, ESL Students, and WR 100: A Reflective Approach to Error “Triage”
- Pattern-Based ESL Errors and Strategies for Helping Students Find and Fix Their Errors
- Cultural Approaches to Motivation and Learning in China and the U.S.
- Reading 100: ESL Students and the Reading Load in WR 100

Example from “Discussion Group”—

Pattern-Based ESL Errors and Strategies for Helping Students Find and Fix Errors

Use correct verb tenses, including the critical present and sequence of tenses. (VT)

- Rule-governed/pattern-based
- “Known” by all students (though the critical present may be new to them)
- May affect comprehension; moderately significant error
- Relatively easy for students to spot, if prompted
- Fairly easy for students to correct, once they’ve spotted the error
- Examples: *When she was a child Amy Tan fails her math test. In “Mother Tongue,” she said that the mother tongue is the way we relate to our families and the world.*
- Suggestion: Give students a simple strategy (in the text vs. in real life), and tell them specifically to read for, find, and correct this error.

Conclusions: Future Directions

- **Ongoing Teacher Training, May 2014**
 - One-day faculty seminar on L2 writing scholarship and applications (7 required journal readings, 5+ hours of instruction/discussion)

- **Institutional Support, June 2014**
 - Report due from Provost's ad hoc Committee on International Student Experiences and Institutional Impact (formed February 2014)

- **Expanded Mediation Integration Initiative, Fall 2014**
 - Three pairs of WR 100 ESL/general classes

- **Action Research Plans, Fall 2014**

We welcome your questions and comments!

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