

Review

Dana R. Ferris and John S. Hedgcock. *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005. 431 pages. \$47.50 (paper).

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In 2001, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) approved the Statement on Second Language Writing and Writers, noting the increasing number of second language writers in North American colleges and universities. Writing teachers and writing program administrators were encouraged “to recognize the regular presence of second language writers in writing classes, to understand their characteristics, to develop instructional and administrative practices that are sensitive to their linguistic and cultural needs” (1). The statement went on to encourage graduate program and writing program administrators to offer more course offerings and more resources to graduate students and their writing instructors to prepare both sectors for increasingly linguistically- and culturally-diverse classrooms. As that demographic trend becomes a reality in many of our colleges and universities, addressing the needs of second language writing has become a priority for many WPAs and mainstream composition instructors. In light of those needs the second edition of *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* by Dana R. Ferris and John S. Hedgcock is a welcome addition to the bookcases of all writing teachers and WPAs.

Since this book was originally published in 1997, the field of second language writing has grown substantially. Ferris and Hedgcock have updated this text to reflect the growing body of research in this area, along with the complicated realities and demographic shifts occurring in English writing classrooms around the world. This volume follows what the authors articulate as a “theory-to-practice approach,” combining comprehensive reviews of research and then providing practical teaching suggestions derived from the research. As Ferris and Hedgcock explain, “Instead of viewing theory as abstract and distant from the challenges we face as novice and expert teachers, we should recognize its enormous practical utility: [w]ithout the knowledge provided by theoretical principles, we lose sight of a crucial tool for

responsible instructional planning and classroom decision making” (3). The authors note that they envision four major audiences for the book: teacher-educators and graduate students in TESL programs, in-service ESL and EFL writing teachers, mainstream composition instructors, and researchers concerned with second language writing.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this Ferris and Hedgcock volume—“Theoretical and Practical Issues in ESL Writing,” “ESL Writing and L2 Literacy Development,” respectively—are of particular interest to those who are only beginning to learn about ESL writers and issues surrounding second language acquisition. Ferris and Hedgcock provide a thorough review of the research and theories from both L2 and L1 composition. These chapters provide readers with a well-informed review of the literature and help mainstream composition instructors and WPAs to see connections across the L1–L2 spectrum. An aspect of chapter 2 that is particularly interesting is the authors’ examination of genre knowledge in building academic literacies. As the authors explain, “It is necessary for L1 and L2 students alike to achieve disciplinary awareness, genre knowledge, text comprehension, and production skills” (49).

Chapters 3 and 4 concentrate on “the day-to-day planning tasks of writing teachers” (73). “Syllabus Design and Lesson planning in ESL Composition Instruction” (chapter 3) provides a comprehensive instruction kit for new teachers. A number of tools and figures assist novice instructors to develop their course objectives, including an inventory of institutional and education variables, a writing-styles questionnaire for students, samples of course objectives, a syllabus checklist, lesson-plan checklist, a sample syllabus, and a sample of a detailed lesson plan. “Text Selection, Materials Development, and Task Construction in ESL Composition” (chapter 4) builds on the elements of course design by examining the pros and cons of relying on a textbook and providing new instructors with criteria for choosing a textbook that best meets the needs of students, instructional objectives, and institutional goals.

Chapters 5 through 8 are useful to even the most experienced of composition instructors, at work with a wide range of students. Chapter 5, “Teacher Response to Student Writing: Issues in Oral and Written Feedback,” provides principles and guidelines for teacher feedback to ESL writers. The annotated student essay, showing examples of instructor response, is particularly helpful to readers. Chapter 6, “Building a Community of Writers: Principles of Peer Response” explores the benefits and challenges of peer response for ESL writers and provides solid, useful suggestions about how to make peer response an integral part of the writing classroom. In chapter 7, “Improving Accuracy in Student Writing: Error Treatment in the Composition Class-

room,” Ferris and Hedgcock address the eight core questions that writing instructors have about error treatment, including “Does error feedback help students at all? What is an error? What kinds of errors do ESL writers most typically make? Should error feedback be *selective* or *comprehensive*? Should error feedback focus on *larger* or smaller *categories* or types? Should feedback be direct or indirect? Should errors be *labeled* or *located*? *Where in the text* should error feedback be given?” (263). The chapter includes sample student papers with examples of error-marking strategies, along with sample exercises, error logs, and procedural advice. The guidelines and principles put forth in these three chapters will provide writing teachers with strategies and approaches that can benefit native English writers as well as L2 students. In chapter 8, “Classroom Approaches to ESL Writing Assessment,” Ferris and Hedgcock examine the challenges and opportunities of writing assessment, the approaches to scoring ESL writing, and the principles of portfolio assessment. This chapter includes rubrics, scoring guides, and opportunities for scoring practice, ending with some practical advice on managing workload, grading anxiety, and assigning course grades.

Chapter 9, “Technology in the Writing Classroom: Uses and Abuses” reviews the effects of technology on L2 writing and writers and the pedagogical implications of computer-assisted writing instruction; the authors note that the move toward technology in the writing classroom presents both opportunities and challenges to ESL writers.

The new layout and design of the text have made it more accessible and reader-friendly. In some instances, the writing can feel dense because of the thorough treatment of research and theory. The authors, perhaps realizing that concern, have made many efforts throughout the text to supply readers with useful implications, suggestions, and comments that will resonate with teachers wherever they may be in their teaching careers and institutional settings. The book includes a good deal of course-related apparatus. Each chapter begins with “questions for reflection” that aim to situate the reader in preparation of the material to come. In addition, each chapter concludes with succinct chapter summaries, reflection and review questions at the end of each chapter, and application activities. Shadowed boxes throughout the chapters show readers some classroom implications of the research and theories. These boxes are particularly helpful for those readers who may find the theory-related sections challenging, particularly given the abundance of material included here. Such instructional elements make the text more interactive and engaging, and the redesigned layout brings instructional elements to the forefront.

The instructional elements make *Teaching ESL Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* a solid textbook for a course on writing theory or, better still, a practicum text for new writing teachers. Given the wide scope of the intended audience, the book could also be used as a primary text in courses for preservice ESL and mainstream writing instructors. But the inclusion of course-related devices do not diminish the book's appeal for more experienced instructors who may be searching for a resource to better inform their pedagogy while meeting the needs of ESL students. Indeed, the text is of interest to WPAs working in a variety of university contexts, including English as a Second Language (ESL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs.

Well researched, this volume presents a cohesive and thorough overview of the second language writing in terms of the history of the discipline, the theories, and the pedagogy. In many ways, the weakness of the text may be that it is trying to reach a broad audience of teachers, in terms of their experience, their institutional contexts, and their geographical settings. The authors have taken an ambitious view of its potential readership, and as a result, readers may choose which sections of the text are most targeted to their current teaching situation. It also will provide new writing teachers with practical insights into the nuts-and-bolts of building a writing course, whether the course is for native-English or ESL writers. For experienced writing instructors, the chapters contain discussions that speak directly to rethinking of course design to make courses more inclusive of nonnative English speakers. For WPAs, the book is a valuable resource and a strong textbook choice for the teaching practicum as well as for courses on writing theory and pedagogy.

WORKS CITED

"CCCC Statement on Second Language Writers and Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 52.4 (2001): 669-74.