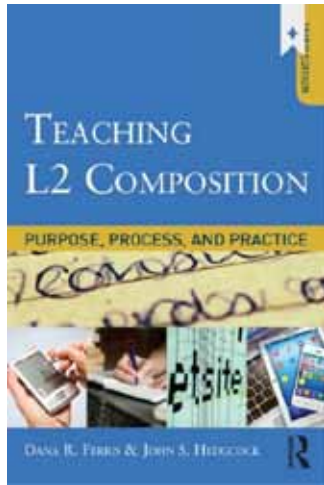


Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice

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Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice

Dana R. Ferris & John S. Hedgecock

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Learning how to write is a complex task in any language, but learning to write in a nonnative language presents its own special set of challenges. Teaching second language (L2) writing is about more than just creating lesson plans. It is about grounding classroom decisions in pedagogical principles supported from the research literature. *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, and Practice* by Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) provides valuable information for a wide range of L2 professionals. Currently in its third edition, the book makes a useful reference to pre-service and in-service L2 writing professionals as well as writing centers which serve an L2 population.

Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) noted some improvements of interest in this 3rd edition of the text. For example, the term “ESL” was changed to “EL” to include a broader and more current term. Acknowledging multilingualism, students are referred to as “multilingual” or “L2” writers in the text. The authors also added three new chapters to the 3rd edition with the aim to provide a broader description of student population in L2 classrooms, focus on theory behind composition pedagogy, and expand on developing practical language skills in the writing classroom (pp. xiv-xv). Finally, the authors decided to imbed a discussion of technology into each chapter instead of keeping it in a standalone chapter. The authors address their text towards their intended audience with a blend of research and practicality which will appeal to researchers, teacher trainers, and L2 writing instructors alike.

A strength of the book is its clear organization, which enables the target audience to understand the material effectively. *Teaching L2 Composition: Purpose, Process, Practice* has three main sections. The

first section (Chapters 1-3) is what Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) call the “foundation chapters,” and these chapters discuss the underlying theories behind teaching pedagogy. The second section (Chapters 4-6) applies theory in a discussion of “reading-writing connections, [practical] instructional design, and assessment” (p. xvi). Finally, the third section (Chapters 7-9) directly addresses error correction and feedback on L2 writing. Every section builds from discussion in prior chapters. To illustrate, sociocultural theory introduced in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 3 is touched upon in Chapter 5’s discussion on course design, and again in Chapter 6’s overview on assessment practices in L2 writing classrooms. An additional benefit to this text is that every chapter begins with reflective questions. All chapters then conclude with resources for additional reading, reflection questions, and useful application activities. These built-in questions and activities are useful for an active reading experience and also as classroom activities for teacher educators, thus appealing to the target audience.

The three chapters in the first section focus on the history of writing, types of L2 learners, and pedagogical theories which successfully lay the foundation for the practices discussed in the rest of the book. Chapter 1 effectively ties the history of writing along with features of L2 writing to address “intercultural rhetoric” (IR) and its potential impact on L2 writing teaching. The historical overview of writing forms begins in 3500 BCE and explains the development of writing from its origins in Sumerian cuneiform to modern lexigraphic and logographic systems. An important connection is made between different types of script systems and how these may either aid or interfere with learning to write in a new language. For example, logographic systems like Mandarin Chinese may make word analysis difficult for these students in an English language classroom (pp. 12-13). Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) also connect dimensions of writing development in L2 to schemata (content, cultural, formal, and linguistic), which shape how students approach writing (p. 17). Connection to Kaplan’s well-known 1966 study of contrastive rhetoric situates the discussion of intercultural rhetoric and its implications on L2 writing challenges. The authors clearly address two purposes for their chapter: to show the impact writing has had on culture throughout the world, and (more practically-oriented) to contrast writing systems across languages to highlight potential challenges L2 students may have from L1 transfer into a new language. Chapter 1 succeeds at connecting history and written language differences to understand why this matters in L2 writing classrooms.

Chapter 2 classifies and contrasts types of L2 learners and learning settings in order to educate teachers who will work with these populations. Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) broke down the recognizable English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) category of English learners to explain strengths and challenges these populations face. For example, international students in an ESL setting have several strengths, such as being typically well-educated and literate in their L1s, a trait Cummins agrees aids in L2 literacy development. The authors also state several challenges international students may face such as weaker speaking and listening skills compared to reading and writing skills. They may also not understand or value the workshop-style writing classes and peer review processes common in the US English language classroom. Additional strengths and challenges for other ESL students, such as resident immigrants and Generation 1.5 learners as well as EFL students, are described. Also, institutional contexts such as academic, nonacademic settings, and intensive language programs are classified in terms of strengths and challenges. Readers may notice more emphasis on the ESL context in this chapter compared to the EFL context. However, the classification of learners and learning settings

are provided in a clear and effective way for the target audience to apply this knowledge to their own educational contexts.

Chapter 3 is the most theoretically-driven chapter which takes the reader on a journey through the evolution of theory, research, and practice from the early 20th century to arrive at the current trends in modern L2 writing instruction. The authors accomplish this by featuring multiple large themes within the subject such as history of rhetoric and linguistics; the intersection of theory, research, and practice for L1 and L2 English composition instruction; shifts in pedagogy in these fields over time. One of the key areas included in the text, which is most relevant for the target audience, is the explanation of process-oriented approaches to writing in English composition contexts. Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) show current trends in L2 writing have moved away from the 1960's "focus on discursive form" which simply used writing to showcase linguistic accuracy (p. 75). Instead, these current trends focus on writers, collaborations with peers, and writing for intended academic disciplines. The authors also argue that modern sociocultural theoretical orientation indicates an "appreciation for the social, and often political context in which L2 writers must learn and live" (p. 87). The authors call for "purposeful and contextualized communicative interaction" in writing classrooms (p. 87). Interactive classroom pedagogy in L2 classrooms is a current and important trend in the TESOL field (Ellis, 2008). The wide berth of information in this chapter is certainly easier for readers with a background in theory, but it is a valuable component of this text because it grounds the statements about pedagogical decisions in future chapters.

The three chapters in section 2 address classroom planning and assessment in L2 writing instruction, effectively tying theory into practical application. Chapter 4 emphasizes the deep connection between reading and writing skills. These thoughts are also echoed in mainstream American university level English composition texts (DasBender, 2011; Bunn, 2011). Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) show support for the bidirectional and nondirectional perspectives on reading-writing relationships, and use this point of view to advocate micro as well as macro skills in reading instruction in a writing classroom. The authors also argue that genre analysis instruction has an important part in a socioliterate writing classroom because this exploration, understanding, and questioning of genres "demystifies texts" to the betterment of the L2 writers (p. 117). Besides preparing teachers for the writing task design in their classrooms, this chapter also provides an important theoretical orientation from which to evaluate textbooks, a task with many implications for learner outcomes. The practicality in the application activities in this chapter is particularly helpful for teachers. For instance, the chapter includes useful activities such as how to produce an effective writing prompt for a target student audience.

Chapter 5 discusses additional practical elements of course design for an L2 writing classroom. The authors describe clear steps towards effective L2 writing course development, from needs assessment followed by syllabus creation, and finally lesson planning. The authors created a very user-friendly chapter with helpful guidelines and illustrative tables to accomplish course design. In addition, the chapter highlights interconnection of needs analysis, curricular framework, goals, and learning objectives. To their credit, the authors acknowledge that there is no single "robust framework for curriculum and syllabus design for L2 writing" (p. 147). However, they state that grounding the process of curriculum design in sound principles creates a "defensible instructional framework" satisfying student and teacher needs within an institution of learning (Brown, 2011, as cited in Ferris & Hedgecock, 2013, p. 158).



Chapter 6 focuses on the practical elements and considerations of assessment in L2 writing classrooms. The authors classify and describe multiple types of assessment, discuss issues of reliability and validity, and conclude with practical considerations for choosing them. Within the discussion of assessments, the section about scoring papers is of particular value to teachers because it is such an instrumental element of a writing class. Therefore, Ferris and Hedgecock's (2013) description of rubrics and scoring methods is highly applicable to all the teachers who read this chapter. The chapter concludes with a discussion of practical considerations to be taken when deciding how to score student papers, a theme which is further explored in the final section of the book.

The third section of the book centers on feedback, treatment of errors, and development of skills in L2 writing. Chapter 7 grounds the discussion of feedback in existing research literature on the subject, and then provides a practical description of feedback processes and options to provide this feedback for the L2 writing classroom. This is an important subject for all writing teachers, as Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) rightfully state, “[feedback] represents the single largest investment of teacher time and energy” (p. 238). The authors state that research on feedback has naturally focused on effects of teacher comments on student writing, student opinions of teacher comments, and studies of how teachers give comments to students. The consensus in the reviewed literature is that students want feedback from their teachers and use the feedback given in their writing. However, the authors highlight that teacher feedback must be clear and consistent to be useful to the students, and provide a practical guide for teachers to accomplish this task. Another useful element presented in this chapter is the reminder of alternatives to written teacher commentary, such as peer conferences, teacher conferences, and writing center assistance. The authors acknowledge L2 writing teachers' common feelings of being overwhelmed by feedback responsibilities for their classes, and give options to increase efficiency in the feedback process as well as alternative options for this important part of an L2 writing class.

Chapter 8 focuses on treatment of errors in L2 writing. It includes a survey of relevant research perspectives and follows with an overview of different types of error correction and recommendations on these approaches. Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) acknowledge the academic argument Truscott (1996; 2007) made against error correction in L2 writing. However, Ferris and Hedgecock emphasize teachers' understanding of their “responsibility to help students move past serious meaning-impeding errors and stigmatizing errors” (p. 281). Core concerns about error correction in L2 writing are listed in a helpful manner for the reader, and recommendations on what type of error feedback to give are provided with empirical support. Support for perspectives on error feedback included in this chapter follow current trends in the research literature (Biber et al., 2011; Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

The final chapter in this text, Chapter 9, brings together the conversation of feedback practices and teacher training with practical takeaways for the L2 writing class. Practical principles for grammar/language instruction are listed and supported, clear advice on how to selectively teach grammar lessons is given, and structures of mini-lessons are explained with examples. The authors provide a useful chart that includes a helpful summary of L2 writing errors teachers need to know. The application activities in this chapter provide practical advice for educators as they give step-by-step models for identifying student language learning needs, using course texts for language lessons, and developing mini-lessons in the L2 writing classroom.

Ferris and Hedgecock (2013) have effectively created a text to reach their intended audience: educators, current L2 writing instructors, writing program administrators, and researchers in L2 writing. The text acknowledges ESL and EFL L2 writing contexts and supports process-approach L2 writing instruction. The authors offer a variety of practical recommendations for L2 writing classes based on theory and research literature, although implementation of these recommendations may vary according to setting and class size (Christensen, 1994; Lin, 2009).

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