TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE
(ESL) WRITING

LING HE

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TEACHING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) WRITING

by

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General Introduction

This paper folio includes three related papers on one topic, teaching English as second language writing. The papers separately discuss three aspects of writing: (a) Teaching ESL writing and culture: Towards a contrastive rhetoric approach; (b) Teaching ESL writing and evaluation: Towards an optimal model for evaluation; and (c) Teaching ESL writing and technology: Towards computer-assisted opportunities for the technical aspects of the writing process.

The paper "Teaching ESL Writing and Culture" addresses cultural issues in the writing of ESL students. Learning to compose in an additional language means learning to compose in an additional culture. Learning to write native-like, fluent, coherent texts that are effective in a discourse community in a second language (L2) cultural setting involves much more than controlling sentence-level grammar and vocabulary. It involves the use of various kinds of knowledge at the discourse level as well as an understanding of cultural assumptions among potential readers. The topics students choose to write about, the ways they develop those topics, the kinds of information they include, the ways they organize the information, and the kinds of inferences they leave for the reader to make are all related to their own rich cultural experiences. The author of this paper discusses these issues and suggests implications for teaching composition, for evaluating student writing, and for moving toward more pluralistic views of rhetoric.

The second paper "Teaching ESL Writing and Evaluation" focuses on formative evaluation and assessment. Two types of methods are discussed: holistic and analytic scorings. In devising ways to measure students' growth in writing, we continuously

struggle with two problems in academic writing: making judgments that are reliable, that we can reasonably assume are not idiosyncratic; and making judgments that are valid, that provide significant information about the writing we are dealing with. These two methods can separately provide useful information about the student's writing performance in these different aspects; however, they are not a cure-all. Thereby, an optimal model is suggested at the end of this paper. The model is intended to make both writing and correcting a positive experience that will promote growth in the target language.

Both writing technology and writing instruction and evaluation have undergone a dramatic transformation thanks to the introduction of computers. The third paper "Teaching ESL Writing and Technology" presents the results of a review of literature questioning, whether and to what extent computers can be used as a means of instruction for the guided acquisition of communicative writing skills in academic writing. Focusing on word processing and electronic mail (E-mail), the paper addresses ways that computers can be used as tools in creating functional L2 learning environments. The successful computer projects are those in which students use written language to communicate for real purposes with real audiences and in ways that promote L2 development.

The three papers are presented here in the above order.

General Conclusion

The research reviewed in these three papers has addressed the issues stated at the beginning of each paper.

The paper "ESL Writing and Culture" broadly describes traditional tendencies within Chinese cultures so that native English speaking teachers can interpret Chinese ESL students' behaviors with more understanding and make informed decisions about how to construct a cross-cultural writing curriculum. The literature review suggests that evaluation of Chinese ESL students' writing should not only focus on their surface errors. Rather, native English speaking teachers should struggle against rigid, oversimplified notions of how essays should be structured: rhetorical conventions. The paper states that better pedagogy demands that teachers respond to larger features of Chinese ESL students' writing products: their deeply rooted social, political, and ideological beliefs and values. A successful cross-cultural encounter involves negotiation of values through discussion. That is, writing teachers should teach ESL students English cultural and sociological values and beliefs and disciplinary ideologies pertaining to academic writing.

The paper ESL Writing and assessment reviews two types of formative assessment and evaluation methods: analytic and holistic scorings. When a reliable score is needed for a student, a score representing his or her writing performance at one point in time, relative to the performance of other students' writing at the same time on the same topics – an analytic scale will guide and focus the raters' scoring, ensuring enough agreement to permit a reliable score to come from summed multiple ratings. On the other hand, holistic scoring is rapid and efficient in judging a student's overall writing

performance. Combing with these two approaches, an optimal model suggested in this paper refers to procedures and techniques which can be used within the context of ESL students' writing products. The suggested model strongly insists that clearly telling the students the evaluation objectives first, and giving specific positive feedback on the initial efforts is also important to fair and equitable assessment and evaluation.

The literature on computer-assisted language learning indicates that language learners have generally positive attitudes toward using computers in the classroom (Reid, 1986; Neu & Scarcella, 1991; Phinney, 1991), and a fairly large literature has developed examining the effectiveness of computer-assisted language learning (for a review, see Dunkel, 1991). The paper "ESL Writing and Technology" has reached the following conclusions: E-mail communication has provided some unique features that rarely happen in the traditional writing classroom and word processing plays a role in the guided acquisition of communicative writing skills and the technical aspects of the writing.

Paper 1

Teaching ESL Writing and Culture:

Towards a Contrastive Rhetoric Approach

Introduction

During the past decades, more and more attention has been given to the context of a culture in which language is meaningfully studied. A great deal has been done in comparing and contrasting writings by English as a Second Language (ESL) students and native English speakers in terms of organizational patterns, genre preferences, and sentence and other grammatical structures. Differences in the number of surface errors made by ESL students are obvious to teachers and have been documented by researchers (Ahrens, 1984; Fein, 1980; Kroll, 1983). However, error is not the only difference between texts written by ESL students and their native English speaking peers. Even with errors removed from essays, researchers (McGirt, 1984; Whitley, 1984) have found that native English speaking readers give higher scores to papers of native speakers than to those written by ESL students. Clearly, other important differences exist. The research shows few findings to explain these existing differences, such as why and how cultural thought patterns, political beliefs and ideological values constitute the rhetorical habits which students bring into their writing in second languages, especially in second-language writing classrooms. There is a need for more research to address the reality that when English is taught as a second language; there are necessarily cultural differences between the teacher and his/her students (Wong & Valadez, 1986). As a possible consequence of the lack of research in this area, classroom teachers still reportedly tend to see English writing by Chinese ESL students as "poor" because of "indirectness", "digressions", "loosely-developed topics," and " lack of transitional signals" in their writing (Gregg, 1987; Kaplan, 1968; Matalene, 1985; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989). Such judgments, however, are based merely on surface, textual features in writing need to be located within an understanding of the students' own culture.

I strongly believe that the different rhetorical conventions that ESL students incorporate into their English writing are situated in the deeper and broader social, political and ideological beliefs and values that these students bring from their native cultures. Because of this, I decided to do a literature review on this topic with special attention to Chinese ESL students. The purpose of this paper is to argue that, when evaluating English compositions by Chinese ESL students, teachers should try to look beyond superficial textual features to examine the underlying factors that influence and shape students' thinking and writing; that is, they should go beyond the rhetorical conventions to investigate how the sociopolitical ideologies and cultural values held by Chinese ESL students.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part attempts to discuss a set of points: (a) the theoretical rationale for writing this paper, (b) ideology and written academic discourse in Chinese culture, and (c) how Chinese ESL students tend to apply discourse strategies of Chinese academic discourse and cultural and sociopolitical ideologies to their English writing. The discussion about these points is based on the analyses of writing samples by Chinese ESL students. The second part suggests a way of teaching English writing to Chinese ESL students through a study of contrastive rhetoric and writing-as-process theory.

A number of researchers (e.g., Chafe, 1980; Connor & McCagg, 1987; Gumperz, 1986; Namba & Chick, 1987; Ostler, 1987; Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; and Tannen, 1984, 1986) have also recognized that understanding how writing in a second language (L2) is also influenced by the cultural and linguistic conventions of the writer's first language (L1). Contrastive rhetoric approaches seem entirely appropriate within such models since they seek to define L1 influences on text coherence, on perceived audience responses, and on features of context, all of which realize heavily on culture expectations. Writing-as-process theory also plays a role in contrastive

rhetoric, for writing is viewed as a composing process that subsumes a way of dealing with a culturally defined logic of content and permits the management of coherence and cohesion systems through which such logic may be reflected in text. With these two approaches, contrastive rhetoric and writing-as-process theory, I hope to foster an awareness of some different composing conventions which exist in different cultures and explain how these differences need to be addressed in teaching composition. I also believe that the study of differences may enliven people's interest in other cultures, while recognizing similarities may help people of one culture to appreciate the other. The paper has no intention of praising one culture or criticizing the other. Instead, I hope writers in both cultures would benefit from it.

Part One

Leading Writing Theories and Pedagogues

Most writing theorists and pedagogues have long given up their traditional view of writing as an independent process outside of its specific social context; they realize the writer's thinking is shaped by the immediate social context. Culture, politics and ideologies are all aspects of this context. In other words, culture forms a vast structure of language, customs, knowledge, ideas, and values which provides a people with a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality (Nobles 1985). As Marilyn Cooper argues, "language and texts are not simply the means by which individuals discover and communicate information, but are essentially social activities, dependent on social structures and processes not only in their interpretive but also in their constructive phases" (quoted by LeFevre, p. 9). Korzenny (1991) claims, "making culture explicit will … help us understand ourselves in contrast to others" (p. 57).

The idea of writing taking place in a social context is also supported by a Vygotskian perspective. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that human learning is always mediated through others such as parents, peers, and teachers, and these interactions themselves are mediated. Humans use cultural tools and artifacts (e.g., speech, writing, and computers) to mediate their interactions with each other and with their surroundings. Vygotsky's theory posits a strong, dialectic connection between external (social), practical activity mediated by the use of cultural tools, such as speech and writing, and individuals' intellectual activity. Writing is one of these activities. The practical implication of Vygotsky's theory for ESL teaching considered by this paper is that it provides a constant, critical perspective on the social organization of instruction.

Similarly, the function of a social context to writing is advanced by Karen LeFevre (1987) in her <u>Invention as a Social Act</u>. LeFevre proposes that writing is socially constructed, in that "the language or other symbol systems the single writer works with are socially created and shared by members of discourse communities" (p. 34). She maintains that the writer composes "on a foundation of knowledge accumulated from previous generations, knowledge that constitutes a social legacy of ideas, forms, and ways of thinking" and writing is substantially influenced by "social collectives, such as institutions, governments, and 'invisible colleges' of academic disciplinary communities" (p. 34). She emphasizes that the evaluation and actual use of what is composed also largely depends on the social context of its invention (p. 35).

Every community has its own distinctive culture, although the members of a given community are often not themselves explicitly aware of the nature of their culture, especially as it may relate to others. As Moerman (1988) puts it, "all natives take their native knowledge for granted, take it to be nothing other than the nature of the world " (p. 4). To explain and understand any human social behavior, we need to know the meaning attached to it by the

participants themselves (Nelson, 1990). Lisle and Mano (1997) point out that while it is easy to assume that our values and rhetorical practices are natural or self-evident, studies of writing in other cultures indicate that both content and form are based on principles that vary widely from culture to culture. An international study cited in Lisle and Mano's research (1997) found that student essays written on the same topic, written by students from different cultures, differed considerably in focus and patterns of coherence, as well as the use of concrete detail, figurative language, and personal references. The discussion of writing in a social context is expected to help broaden in a relatively fair way the criteria for "good writing" in ESL writing classes in general, and more specifically, in classes of Chinese ESL students.

Ideology in Chinese Culture

The prevailing social and political ideologies in Chinese culture are the pursuit of morality, stability and harmony. These values were proposed and reinforced by generations of leadership in Chinese history but with two most representative figures: one was China's consummate teacher, Confucius, and the other was the Chinese leadership, the last being the late chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Tze-tong.

Confucius, one of the greatest philosophers of all time emerged in China in the late sixth century BC, whose philosophy and religion came to dominate China for more than two millennia, was convinced from early on that the restoration of past glory lay in the restoration of past moral values. He maintained that social stability and prosperity were based on the fulfillment of the moral contract between the ruler and the ruled. As one of his famous sayings goes, "If you govern the people by virtue, you may be compared to the Pole-star, which keeps its place, while all the other stars revolve round it." It is obvious that one important goal of "good writing" is to meet

moral values or Tao. Tao is often translated as "the way of life" in English, yet it means a lot more than that; it can refer to morality, justice, ideals and principles. Writing is reviewed as a vehicle of Tao in Chinese culture, the acquisition and dissemination of an honorable way of life that conforms to certain established moral codes. In this context, learning to write is not just learning some techniques of writing; it enables people to live meaningful lives and to be useful to society according to traditional values.

The essence of Confucian thinking and teaching lies in his principles of *ren3* (see footnote 1), or benevolence, and of *li3*, or propriety of behavior and loyalty to the best social traditions. The primary goal of *ren3* and *li3* is to help manage basic human relationships, establish social harmony, and eventually ensure the authority of the ruling class. Therefore the greatest virtue of Chinese intellectuals is their forbearance. The Chinese character of "forbearance" vividly expresses its implication. It actually consists of two characters: a knife and a heart. Forbearance means you can withstand having a knife pointed to your heart. That is very painful. However, you have to bear it. Chinese teachers' evaluation of student papers clearly reflects their moralistic values. They insist most rigorously that student writing be measured, first and foremost, on the significance of its ideological content. The Confucian education system emphasizes teaching by strict moral models. To achieve that goal, Chinese students are obliged to be the gatekeepers of social morality and ethics.

Mao played the same transmissive role as Confucius did. In his "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art," he laid down guidelines for proletarian creative arts. Mao (1956) was very direct about this: " In literary and art criticism there are two criteria, the political and artistic. ... each class in all class society has its own political and artistic criteria. But all classes in all class societies invariably put the political criterion first and the artistic criterion second" (p. 84-90).

In response to Mao's call, a series of movements were started, discussing the direction of art. One example is a heated national-wide discussion on such an issue in the sixties. A student wrote a composition entitled "Jasmine Flower." The student described with admiration the quiet elegance and serene dignity of the flower, and her teacher gave her an excellent grade. However, when the piece was published in nation-wide newspapers for public discussion, it was criticized as expressing "unhealthy bourgeois sentiments" and the teacher was denounced as having failed to measure student writings with correct political standards. These discussions certainly taught the entire profession what was "healthy" and "correct," and where the political zoning lay.

Individuals are responsible for maintaining social harmony. However, individual obligation to social harmony and group values do not recognize the importance of individuality. Rather, individuality is suppressed due to a long history of bowing to authority and acceptance of traditional values, social norms and group ideologies in Chinese culture. Mao (1967) wrote, "What should our policy be toward non-Marxist ideas?" (p. 410). He said "The matter is simple, we simply deprive them of their freedom of speech" (Mao, 1967, p. 410). Individuals are responsible for maintaining social harmony. In general, the importance of individuality is not recognized in Chinese culture. Rather, individuality is suppressed due to the hierarchical nature of Chinese society. Only some key individuals, such as emperors and ministers, are in the position of speaking and making social policies. Self-expression of others is often believed to cause conflict, dissension, or even catastrophe, which may eventually be harmful to both the speaking individuals and social harmony. Therefore, it is widely accepted that "For the sake of safety, do not speak about policies when you are not in the position to make them"(an old Chinese saying). If one has to express personal views, he or she has to use politeness strategies based on compromise, adjustment, and prescribed etiquette. Individuals exist as part of a group (Erbaugh, 1990).

A basic policy in education put forward by the late Chairman Mao is "Education must serve proletarian politics, which still remains one of the guiding principles at present. Another belief related to this policy is that people should be educated in the spirit of socialist morality, which is characterized by collectivism in contrast to individualism and selfishness, mutual help in contrast to personal competition, serving the people and others in contrast to putting personal interest above anything else, and so forth" (Yu, 1984, p. 34).

Written Academic Discourse in Chinese Culture

Under this ruling ideology, Chinese writing is seen as a powerful way to shape morality and promote social progress. Good writing, therefore, should carry a positive or, more desirably, a profound moral message. Therefore most Chinese ESL students seldom include those "gray" or "dark" or "dangerous" topics in their English writing, like "suicide", "a beggar", "garbage" and the like. For example, when the time comes to write something about people, it is usually recommended to write about a good person, a person who has a noble character and is worthy of admiration and emulation. A morally wicked person or a beggar is usually unacceptable subject. No matter how well-organized the writing is or how clearly the ideas are demonstrated, if it does not bring something "positive", "bright" or "encouraging to others", a paper will be relentlessly judged to be of no value. Therefore most Chinese writers know the importance of *hua4 long2 dian3 jin4* (Bring the painted dragon to life by putting in the pupils of its eyes). This becomes a writing strategy for Chinese writers to add the touch of the "dragon's eye" (see footnote 2) at the end of the writing to bring the theme to life. Here "life" implies loyalty to the norm of social morality. Most Chinese writing aims to discover the good and the beautiful, in terms of this norm. Providing a moral lesson to the story may be due to what Yu (1984) describes as the

government policy in education. This may be the reason that numerous native English speaking researchers (e.g., Hinkel, 1995; Lebra, 1986; Scollon, 1993; Scollon & Scolllon, 1992) feel puzzled at why Chinese students like to say, "I *must* take care of my parents." "People *have to* respect their teachers." "I *must* study to respect my parents and to participate in the development of my country". "The great virtue of our Chinese intellectuals is forbearance". It is because of social morality that Chinese students use auxiliary verbs in this way. It is because of traditional morality that the Chinese students want to put a "knife" at their "heart" as their character of "forbearance" shows. The special Chinese sociopolitical ideology leads to Chinese writers' single-minded insistence on ideological correctness and its positive effects brought to society. In a word, being loyal to the social order or tradition and having a theme which reflects their values are compatible with the Chinese literacy tradition.

The emphasis on collectivism and the devaluing individuals may explain the phenomenon that Chinese ESL students tend to avoid using "I" and usually prefer to use the passive voice, "we" or the third person. This may be the reason why Erbaugh (1990) is puzzled at Chinese anonymous or pseudonymous art and baffled by the Chinese lack of concern over who wrote what sections of the famous novel, *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, or the lead stories in *People's Daily*. "By Chinese lights, art is supposed to provide a moral model or ideal beauty either sponsored by the regime, or in dissent from it" (Erbaugh, 1990, p. 16). In contrast, most North Americans are likely to have more tolerance of individual difference with the belief that there are no absolute universal truths and that people have to live with differences.

Rhetoric, which in this paper means to influence people through speech, is an appendage to politics and ideological claims. This can be seen in the eight-legged essay and the four-part essay of Chinese expository writing. The eight-legged essay is known in Chinese as *ba1 gu3*

wen2, meaning an essay of eight parts (see Example1 in Appendix). It was first invented as a part of the Chinese civil service examinations during the *Ming* (1368-1644) and *Qing* (1654-1911) dynasties and used by the Chinese ruling class to recruit local officials and to ensure its dictatorship; it thus constituted the main form of academic discourse in ancient China, and its influence continues to be felt in the Chinese discourse communities of Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and particularly China itself.

An eight-legged essay must have the designated eight parts: poti, chengti, qijiang, qiqu, xugu, zhonggu, hougu, and dajie, literally meaning the opening-up, amplification, preliminary exposition, first point, second point, third point, final point, and conclusion. The most important part is the "amplification", usually consisting of two or three sentences, in which the writer introduces the chosen topic and clearly expresses the intended thesis of the essay. In the next six parts the writer elaborates on the topic for ten to twenty sentences. Then, the writer concludes the essay in two to four sentences. In addition, every part must be carefully balanced through rhyming words, paired phrases, and matched length of sentences. In order to be government officials, each individual candidate had to display his mastery of social principles such as *ren3* and *li3* stated above in this paper by writing a well-structured eight-legged essay.

The change in the dominant power groups and their grouping sociopolitical ideologies in Chinese culture have affected Chinese rhetoric and writing. The *qi3-cheng2-jun4-he2* four-part organizational pattern and three-part pattern are two forms used in expository and persuasive writing. The four-part organizational pattern literally means the introduction, the elaboration on the topic, the transition to another seemingly unrelated point, and summing-up (see Example 2 in Appendix). It is the product of the New Culture Movement of the early of the nineteenth century. This four-part pattern may have a historical relation to the Confucian eight-legged essay

(Scollon, 1991) and is believed to have originated historically in Chinese Poetry (Grabe &
Kaplan, 1996). Similarly, the three-part pattern starts with a generalization, then proceeds to an
elaboration, and ends with a speculation. It is an "action" in response to Chairman Mao's call in
the 1950s accusing the four-part essay of failing to "convey the revolutionary ideologies to the
people" (Mao, 1967, p. 63).

It is clear that Chinese academic discourse has always been situated within Chinese politics
and ideologies rather than the other way around. As the gatekeepers and models of these
ideologies, Chinese educators unconditionally commit themselves to the goal of making academic
writing always available to serve the ideological claims and political stands of the power domain.

<u>Discourse Strategies and Ideologies in Writing by Chinese ESL Students</u>

The existing research on Chinese ESL students' language behavior and their writing habits
in particular has found evidence that Chinese ESL students tend to apply discourse strategies
typical of Chinese academic discourse and Chinese cultural and sociopolitical ideologies in their
English writing. In particular, English writing by Chinese ESL students has consistently shown
evidence of use of either the eight-legged or the four-part or the three-part organizational
patterns, restricted expressions of personal feelings and views, an indirect or "spiral" approach to
the chosen topic, and a preference for prescribed, formulaic language, all of which are so
unfamiliar to native English-speaking instructors that they mistakenly perceive these students as
"poor writers". These features will be discussed below.

<u>Indirect Approach</u>

Although most contemporary Chinese have little or no knowledge of the eight-legged

essay (Scollon, 1991) and the *bal gu3* has been dismissed for its " minor and poorly regarded form" and abolished in 1909 in China, at least one of its features persists — the onion-like organization (Lisle and Mano, 1997, p. 16). Instead of directly clarifying his or her ideas to the reader, a Chinese writer tends to use "metaphor and simile," "analogy," and "illustrating anecdotes"(Gregg, 1987, p. 365) to reveal his or her intention. For example, the blending of *qing2* (emotion or the internal world) and *jing3* (nature) is a common distinctive rhetorical strategy utilized in Chinese students' English writing. That is to say instead of using a direct statement, Chinese ESL students often express their thoughts or inner world indirectly by means of the description of "the details in the setting" (*jing3* or image) for symbolic or metaphorical implications. Since poetry is viewed as the most revered genre in the traditional Chinese literature (Erbaugh, 1990), the value of vocabulary (e.g., extensive use of literary proverbs and flowery languages) is considered by Chinese instructors as a major quality of good writing in Chinese ESL English composition (Harris, 1997).

In contrast with the characteristic of directness in English writing, research has found evidence of transfer of topic development strategies typical of Chinese discourse expectations in English compositions by Chinese ESL students. In investigating the rhetorical patterns of English and Chinese expository prose style, Fagan and Cheong (1987) analyzed sixty English compositions written by Chinese ESL students in Singapore. They found out that all "the sixty students were influenced by Chinese rhetorical styles," at that 50.9% of them wrote their English compositions following "the Chinese four-part patterns of Introduction-Body-Subtheme-Conclusion," instead of "the English three-part pattern of Introduction-Body-Conclusion" (p. 27). When the four-part-pattern style is used by Chinese ESL students, it usually abides by the specific requirements for form: a focus (concentrating on a few selected events or details that best

illustrate the theme), a structural "thread" (preferably an image that connects all parts), an opening that introduces the topic and an ending that correlates the opening and creates a sense of completeness (Zhou, 1989). In the frame of this four-part pattern, Chinese ESL students like to discuss background at length before making a statement; a simple topic sentence without historical documentation is seen as shallow (Erbaugh, 1990). The theme is gradually drawn forth and cannot be seen clearly until the end of writing. This may be what Birch (1972) described "the duller the beginning, the more brilliant the final illumination" (p. 212) in Chinese writing. Thus a common joke is "When you want to know what the Chinese really want to say, please notice the P.S. (postscript)". In contrast, introductions that are historical and do not "get right to the point" would be considered inappropriate in English (Erbaugh, 1990).

Such discourse strategies by Chinese ESL in a modern English paragraph would strike the native English readers as awkward and unnecessarily indirect. Kaplan (1972) remarks that "The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly" (p. 46). Based on the Western values of conciseness, direction, and clarity, compared to such an indirect approach, Erbaugh (1990) argues that the Chinese may be "poetic" but that they think less logically than Americans. Fortunately, some other native English-speaking researchers have responded critically to Erbaugh's comment.

Hinds (1990) claims that Chinese rhetorical frameworks are really all variants of a general organizational strategy in writing which he terms quasi-inductive, and which that Westerners do not understand, --- that is, a thesis statement is often buried in the passage. Similarly, Grabe & Kaplan (1996) point out that Westerners who are familiar with strictly deductive and inductive frameworks, which typically emphasize a "logic" (not an absolute mathematical logic, but a culturally defined logic) with the functions of a topic sentence in developing ideas, think that it is a

writer's responsibility to make relationships, purposes, and messages as transparent as possible within the conventions for the text type; in contrast, Chinese readers are expected to work to fill in information and transitions, and a writer who does all the work for the reader is not as highly valued. In other words, the Chinese language is clarified as a reader-responsible system in which texts place heavy responsibility on the reader to understand what is being suggested. Chinese texts also assume a quantity of shared knowledge (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; Hinds, 1987). Reid (1988) argues that reader-responsible preferences in the Chinese language may explain consistent findings for shorter sentence length in the English writing by Chinese ESL students, then by students whose first language is English. According to Reid (1988), this feature reflects preferences in Chinese writing for brevity, simple sentence and reading between the lines. Similar arguments are given by Matalene (1985), and Ostler (1987). In particular, Fagan and Cheong (1987) argue that it is the use of this four-part organizational pattern that causes English compositions by Chinese ESL students to be "characterized by longwindedness, digression, and indirectness" which are considered "problems" in writing when compared to the supposed "conciseness, brevity, and simplicity" encouraged by the English three-part pattern (p. 25)

Tsao (1990) has argued that Chinese ESL students often tend to construct their English paragraphs, as well as whole essays, using the strategies of *qi3-cheng2-jun4-he2* pattern (see Example 2 in Appendix) and this is what causes "problems" when they are writing English. In this style, the first sentence prepares the reader for the topic (*qi3*), the second and third sentences introduce and elaborate on the topic (*cheng2*); the fourth sentence (*jun4*) turns to another seemingly unrelated subtheme but a transition to the final conclusion; and the final sentence concludes the paragraph with a summing-up (*he2*). This type of paragraph organization exactly

reflects Fan Shen's description of Chinese writing as piercing an onion, layer by layer, "moving from surface to the core"(1989, p. 462). Since cohesion devices and subordinate relationships between sentences are not important in this type of paragraphing, English paragraphs by Chinese ESL students often receive such comments as: "lacking clear topic statement" and "the relationships between ideas not explicitly signaled"(Gregg, 1987, p. 356) or "a lot of unnecessary wandering around the topic" (Kaplan, 1968, p. 12).

<u>Restriction of Individual and Worship of Power</u>

Because of the high emphasis on social stability and harmony, the avoidance of free expression of personal views and feelings is perhaps the most discussed Chinese discourse strategy noted in English compositions by Chinese ESL students (Kaplan, 1988; Matalene, 1985; and Tao, 1990). For example, when taking a controversial stand, or even in a less complicated situation, Chinese writers may use a "some people say" formulation in order to protect their positions by enlisting anonymous support or to avoid appearing too direct when criticizing another position.

Comparatively speaking, citation may seem less important to Chinese students since Chinese tradition holds that individuals exist as part of a group, and that cooperation, not individualism, built Chinese culture. Citation seems like an individual striking out which emphasizes the independent self. However, Chinese ESL students do show an "extraordinary fondness for using quotations and allusion" (Matalene, p. 804-5) with respect to certain authorities. Here is an example from Matalene (1985) (emphasis added):

> *Confucius, the ancient Chinese philosopher, maintains that whatever your calling, "The*
> *first thing to do is to give everything a true and proper name." Now, we have got a*

name, "tractors," it is true, a "A motor vehicle that pulls farm machinery," according to my Longman's dictionary. We should do now is to give every tractor a chance to live up to its expectations. I am nothing of a philosopher, but I have a dream that everyone is aware of this simple, pragmatical idea: *Call a spade a spade. Use a tractor as it should be used.* (p. 804-5)

In Chinese writing, quoting from and referring to the past is not only considered "the height of culture" and " the mark of good breeding" (Tsao, 1990, p. 109), but also regarded as willingness to respect authorities and to accept traditional values, social norms, and group ideologies, and as a politeness strategy. Too much or too straightforward expression of personal views and thinking would "give people the impression of being disrespectful of the communist party in political writings and boastful in scholarly writings"(Shen 1989, p. 460). But unfortunately, too much quoting and referring to the past or providing no references are considered to be poor writing style in English. Thus, an English paragraph by a Chinese ESL student may be seen as full of "frequent recourse to the pronouncements of authorities," "unacknowledged reproduction of key thought units," "a flatly assertive, judgmental tone" (Gregg1987, p. 356), and "poetry, flowery, and florid styles, exaggerations, and use of quotations and reference to the past" (Fagan and Cheong, 1987, p. 25).

To sum up, we find Chinese ESL student writers display their accepted particular expressions and ways, report their understanding of and agreement with the guiding ideology, and show willingness to belong to that particular discourse community and share its collective values. However, when the writer applies this strategy in his or her English writing, it is simply perceived as over-dependence on cliché and an indifference to new, individually-based thought and

expression and a lack of critical thinking. The profound cross-linguistic failure of the writer's intent leads to undeserved negative stereotypes of Chinese writers, which have found their way into the literature. Researchers (e.g., Mohan and Lo, 1985; Wong (1985) have noticed this fact. Mohan and Lo (1985) maintain that if researchers do find indirectness in the papers of Chinese writers, the reasons may be several, among them the students' lack of familiarity with conventions of expository writing. Wong (1985) notes that such matters as digression, lack of paragraph unity, and indirectness are not the monopoly of foreign learners of English but also exist in the papers of writers whose first language is English but are unfamiliar with the conventions of written English. The pedagogical objectives of contrastive rhetoric approaches used here are chosen to make Chinese ESL writing and their teachers familiar with English rhetoric conventions and writing skills. This is some outcomes expected

Part Two

Contrastive Rhetoric and Writing Instruction to Chinese ESL Students

The second part suggests a way of teaching English writing to Chinese ESL students through a study of contrastive rhetoric, that is the study of L1 rhetoric influences on the organization of texts in an L2, and writing-as-process theory. The above discussions illustrate the kinds of evidence collected by researchers through these two approaches. The evidence shows that the ability to write a fluent, coherent text implies more than to control vocabulary, syntax, and mechanics. The effort to understand how writing in a second language (L2) influenced by the cultural and linguistics convention of the writer's first language (L1) is now recognized as an important element which must be accounted for in any approach to L2 writing research and instruction. Therefore, the principal pedagogical implication of contrastive rhetoric in this paper

is that cultural and discourse ideologies or norms of the target language need to be taught in very much the same way that discourse strategies need to be taught, that is, both a pedagogical method and a body of knowledge underlying various types of writing for different audiences in different culturally bound settings are equally important to L2 writing instruction. In classroom teaching of writing to Chinese ESL students, the writing teachers should teach them not only the mechanics of writing in English but also the cultural and sociological values and disciplinary ideologies pertaining to academic discourse in English.

Practically speaking, if teachers want Chinese ESL students to organize their English writing along the "Introduction-Body-Conclusion" three-part patterns (see Example 3 in Appendix), the students should be explicitly taught that this pattern represents an implicit agreement between the writer and the reader in the English language; that the writer follows this pattern to fulfill the reader's expectations; and that English culture and academic discourse endorse linearity over other patterns. Similarly, if teachers want Chinese ESL students to "Be original" or "Be yourself" in their writing, these students should be taught that individuality is encouraged and appreciated in English culture and that free expression of personal views and thinking is essential in certain kinds of English academic writing. In the same way, Chinese ESL students should be assured that unlike the Chinese reader-responsible system where the reader is expected to "dig out" the meaning of writing, it is the writer's responsibility in English expository writing culture to provide most of the structure to Chinese ESL writers. Only such explicit teaching of English discourse ideologies can produce change in the use of discourse strategies in Chinese ESL students' writing because change in the language use comes from change in guiding ideologies and discourse expectations. In other words, when Chinese ESL students have the needed schemata shared by English academic discourse community are they able to compose

effectively in English.

     To achieve this goal, first, ESL writing teachers should be aware of contrastive rhetoric and instill this awareness into the students. With this awareness, teachers will understand that when Chinese ESL students choose a four-part organizational pattern to write an expository essay, it is because they have culturally conditioned schematic knowledge about the task unlike that of native English speaking students who usually follow Introduction-Body-Conclusion, the English three-part-pattern; teachers will also realize that the way Chinese students choose to structure an expository essay reflects the guiding discourse ideology in Chinese culture and students' experiences within it. Moreover, with this awareness teachers will be reminded that there are different composing conventions in Chinese culture and that these differences need to be addressed in teaching composition. This awareness will also remind teachers not to see Chinese ESL students, "even those in 'regular' college writing classes, [who] have not learned to use the organization patterns of U. S. academic prose" as "bad" writers" (Land and Whitley, p. 288).

Writing-as-process Theory and Writing Instruction to Chinese ESL Students

     As well, with writing-as-process theory, teachers need to teach Chinese students English discursive and socio-cultural ideologies through an on-going writing process and also evaluate their writing according to pluralistic rhetorical standards. Teachers also need to teach a number of techniques that can follow from the major pedagogical objectives in contrastive rhetoric. For example, developing a thesis for an English expository essay may be enhanced by: (a) starting an introduction with background information, a thesis statement, and limitation or focuses to the thesis statement, (b) providing topic statements in each paragraph structure following with the supporting evidences or facts and a final concluding sentence to reinforce the main idea of the

paragraph, and (c) producing the concluding sections with the necessary information corresponding to the concepts of results, discussion and conclusions.

Teaching ESL with contrastive rhetoric will benefit both teachers and students. On the one hand, this process will encourage teachers to actively involve their students in many contrastive rhetoric activities, such as collaboration, peer-group feedback, individual feedback, conferencing, and multiple-draft assignments, which will offer students opportunities to have more experience with English culture in general and with academic discourse. On the other hand, by the use of contrastive rhetoric activities, teachers can help students to identify those rhetorical strategies and relevant guiding ideologies gained from their experiences in their native culture; also they can help students modify and make these strategies and ideologies more in tune with their experiences in English culture. Writing is interaction within a particular group, discipline, or scholarly community. Correctness is contextual. Teachers can help students get to know new discourse strategies and ideologies which are necessary for them to compose in English.

Conclusion

The paper focuses on cultural facts that influence Chinese students' writing and that may be misconstructed as poor writing techniques. It is argued in this paper that the different rhetoric conventions that ESL students incorporate into their English writing are based on the deeper and broader social, political, and ideological beliefs and values of their native culture, and that in evaluating this writing, teaching must look at these underlying factors. A review of the history of Chinese literature and analysis of centuries-old essays whose prescribed structure have influenced writing illustrate the source of certain discourse conventions. Avoidance of the Chinese four-part organizational pattern, which is often construed as longwindedness, of the indirectness

approaches of relies on political and moral authorities can be explicitly recommended to students.

The primary implications for classroom ESL composition instruction are that: discourse strategies in English must be taught, not assumed; and Chinese students should be taught English discursive and socio-cultural ideologies through writing and evaluation. This is what Wong et al. (1986) states: if the task of second language educators is to help people better communicate with one another through language, it would seem imperative to include instruction in cultural patterns of perception and thinking as well as increased emphasis on cultural styles of speaking.

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Appendix

Example 1: The Eight-Legged Essay by a Chinese ESL Student

What I know of America

[1. *poti*,(see footnote 3) the opening-up] First impression which United States gave me is that United States is extra-ordinary prosperous and strong. The marvelous well-built freeways, the vast throng o cars, and unlimited farm make one astonished. One can never see these in any countries.

[2. *chengti*, amplification] Because Americans is rich and strong, she plays the most important role in resisting Communist aggression, and contribute more to world peace than any other country. Here I can not help showing my highest respect to Americans and American government.

[3.*qijiang*, the preliminary exposition] American society is open. Every one has equal opportunity to develop himself. Everyone works hard and studies hard in order to success. Everyone intends to so something. Everyone thinks himself capable of some effort. Students want to get better grade; Merchants want to make more money; scholars want to get more knowledge; scientists want to invent more truth.

[4.*qigu*, the first argument] Due to the idea of success and the idea of getting more, Americans are Busy. Busy. Busy. So Longfellow, a poet, said: "Life is a field of battle." American society justified his saying.

[5.*xugu*, the second argument] The Communists proclaim that the capitalism begins to decline, and go to the grave, and the Communism will prevail soon all over the world. The prosperity of American society proves that the Communists are wrong. Here, the labor class can live high standard of living. On the contrary, people in the Communism society are very poor.

[6.*zhonggu*, the third argument] But I must say that American capitalism is not the original form of Capitalism already. Maybe, we can call this form of capitalism: half-capitalism" or "half-socialism." That is to say that American capitalism has been converted into some degree of socialism.

[7.*hougu*, the final argument] Science and technology in United States have been highly progressing. The secret of the nuclear has been known, the space will be conquered in the near future, the moon will be landed by human being. All of these marvelous achievement can never be seen in the human history.

[8.*dajie*, the conclusion] If I am not wrong, I think that Literature and are don't progress as the science does. Perhaps, Americans should give more their attention to literature arts and other humanity.

Example 2: A qi-cheng-jun-he Four-Part Essay by a Chinese ESL Student

[*qi3*, the introduction]: We are dependent, for understanding and for consolation and hope, upon what we learn of ourselves from songs and stories." From this statement, we can know that through songs and stories, people realize themselves, humanity, and their societies. The literacy-the mastery of language and the knowledge of books- is the essential factor that enlarges people's knowledge, and improves mutual realization of people, and then creates the smooth society. From kindergartens to college, from homes to offices, we learn how to interact with someone and how to realize ourselves and out societies. The literacy helps us to accustom and realize them. Hence, "literacy is not an ornament, but a necessity."
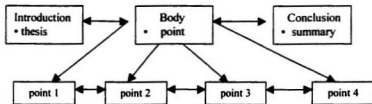
[*cheng2*, the accepting of the topic] In most countries, the instruction in literacy begins to teach how to tell her alphabets in the kindergarten. Then, in elementary school, teachers teach us

how to pronounce well and write words, compositions, and some simple articles. Continuously, in high school, we learn to read the novel and literal masterpiece. Moreover, in college, we should analyze the article and the knowledge of books. Like other most countries, the instruction of literacy in my country is step by step. When we are equipped with some fundamental knowledge, we will be taught more difficult knowledge. Before high school, we more emphasize the formal, correct written Chinese which is not influenced by the illiteracy-the personal style or society-style Chinese. We know something of roots and resources of Chinese. Instead of focusing on the short-term practicality, we emphasize the long-term worth.

[*jun4*, the transition to another seemingly unrelated topic] In my educational experience, I appreciated what my English teachers taught me in the United States. Since my English is not my first language, I am not familiar with the English literature. Maybe I can speak and write English, but I have no idea about the resource of English and the meaning of roots and so on.

[*he2*, the summing up] Everyone needs language, and also everyone needs to know language. The literacy is not an ornament but a necessity. From our birth until death, language always follows us. It is very practical in our daily life. We must know a better language. We must speak, and teach our children to speak a language precise and articulate and lively enough to tell the truth about the world as we know. We hope we can create more smooth and more harmonious society by knowing each others more.

Example 3: Schemata Categories of an English Expository Essay

Footnotes

[1]In this paper, I use Chinese pronunciation or *pin yin* in order to show the direct implication of some famous expression in Chinese. Since there are four tones in Chinese phonetics, I add number after each word in order to avoid the trouble of guessing each word four times.

[2] It originally meant the importance of a dragon's pupils in drawing a dragon. It is borrowed to refer to a strategy in Chinese writing in which the theme is brought to meet the general moral standard. It usually happens at the end of a piece.

[3] The eight parts have been numbered with Arabic numerals simply for the sake of clarity. The parts are not numbered in the traditional essay form. The same situation is in Example 2 in Appendix.

Paper 2

Teaching ESL Writing and Assessment:

Towards an Optimal Model for Evaluation

Introduction

My interest in writing this paper began with an experience when I was in an English class, English 1020 in winter, 1999 at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN). Since writing ability is one of the important qualities for non-native students to succeed academically, all registered international students at MUN are required to attend a one-semester (usually 4 months) writing course. I still cannot forget the big surprise of my first sight of that low mark on my writing paper, on an in-class writing assignment. We were asked to write about whatever difficulties we had met upon our first arrival in Canada. It was fixed-time writing, 10 minutes but with no length limit. Looking at that low mark, with much disappointment, I went back to the lines. I found the places circled with red ink were all grammar or vocabulary mistakes. Grammar and vocabulary definitely counted in the teacher's evaluation. It is obvious that the benchmark for writing in that course is somewhat different from what I applied when I taught English as a foreign language (ESL) in China, which focused on the content and the whole structure of the product. Definitely I cannot generalise from this class and especially this one assignment. It is possible this experience is an exception and the teacher might have laid more emphasis on grammar and vocabulary since these were our main problems. Instructors in this course at MUN do use their rubric to develop holistic or/and analytic criterion to evaluate ESL students with different English ability levels. However, my own experience as an ESL teacher and as a student leads me to ask a series of questions: Can traditional evaluation and assessment emphasising the individual elements of writing such as grammar and vocabulary best measure ESL students' writing products? Do traditional methods of evaluation satisfy ESL teachers' need to know about their students in order to teach more efficiently? Can students improve their writing based on this type of assessment? What are the common evaluation and assessment approaches for ESL

writing associated with especially good and especially poor outcomes in relation to syntax or structure or content or meaning? Might there be more helpful ways of assessing students' second language? How can ESL writing evaluation and assessment involve second language writers in an optimal model for a fair and accurate measurement? These questions will make up the content of this paper. I wonder about the value of this type of evaluation. Therefore, I decided to review the recent professional literature for the purpose of evaluating methods used by other teachers and examining any empirical research studies on second language writing.

This paper is organised in three parts: In part one I first describe the value of writing compositions and then explore the role and the extent of evaluation of these compositions. In part two, I address the question: What are the common evaluation and assessment approaches for ESL writing in relation to syntax, structure, content or meaning? Two popular approaches, holistic scoring and analytic scoring are discussed here. In part three, I address the question: How can an optimal model be developed to incorporate the best features of a fair and accurate measurement for ESL writers? Conclusions from the search of relevant literature and reflections on my personal experience have led to the development of an optimal model for composition evaluation.

Part One

Rationale

Many researchers in second language acquisition advocate a holistic, learner centred approach to language instruction (e.g. Coelho, 1998; Homburg, 1984;Winnerstorm and Heiser, 1992). An implication of this approach is that language should be experienced and taught as a whole. Since effective writing skills are complex behaviours requiring judgement and control

over a variety of cognitive processes, they are hard to "measure." Particularly difficult is the measurement of writing products in context. Because culture and technology are parts of most contexts, the rationale of integrating this context as well as subject area content is in keeping with a holistic approach to language acquisition.

Until recently, the predominant model of assessment in many schools and universities has been the measurement and ranking model. This model relies mainly on "summative" assessment or evaluation, as opposed to "formative" assessment. Summative assessment gives students marks or grades based on how much they have learned by the end of a term or year, or the knowledge and skills they can demonstrate on an examination at specific points during their program. Such an evaluation affects the context. And, because of this evaluation control, teachers are not encouraged to pull up alongside their students to discover why they write in that way. The result is that neither the teacher nor the learner discovers the "why" or the "how" of the test, only the "what" of the result.

What I recommend in this paper is "formative" assessment. Formative assessments take place continuously, in many ways, and are intended to help form or shape the curriculum, and to give helpful feedback to students so that they can improve their performance. Teachers who make ongoing assessment a regular and informal part of the language learning classroom can discover the essential "whys" and "hows" along with their students. Perhaps the greatest benefit is that the learner participates in a non-threatening situation that allows him or her to make informed judgements as a developing writer. These judgements, being individual, allow both the teacher and the student to examine complex strengths without matching performance to a lock-step, comparative timeline.

Definition

In the following section, I will briefly introduce some terms included in this paper. In particular, I will clarify the distinctions between holistic and analytic scoring, assessment and evaluation, and summative and formative evaluation.

Holistic scoring is often referred to as "impressionistic" scoring, for it involves the assignment of a single score to a piece of writing on the basis of an overall impression of it. It is a subjective procedure in which raters make quick judgements on writing samples and assign each one an overall score (White, 1985). Analytic scoring is a method of scoring that requires a separate score for each of a number of aspects of a task, such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, idiomatic expression, organization, relevance, coherence.

Besides these two terms, formative and summative are the other pair of assessment terms. Formative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program while the program activities are forming or happening. Formative evaluation focuses on the process (Bhola, 1990). It is used to improve instruction and learning and to keep both students and teachers aware of the course objectives and the students' progress in meeting those objectives. The results of formative evaluation are analyzed and used to focus the efforts of the teacher and students. In contrast, summative evaluation is a method of judging the worth of a program at the end of the program activities. The focus is on the outcome (Bhola, 1990). Results can provide information about the effectiveness of instruction and the effectiveness of a program. The results of summative evaluation should form only a portion of the data used to determine students' grades. An appropriate balance of formative and summative evaluation is recommended in this paper.

Assessment and evaluation are two other important terms to be discussed in this paper. Assessment is a continuous phase within the evaluation process while evaluation is the weighing

of assessment information against a standard such as learning objectives in order to make a judgement or decision. Assessment may be defined as any method used to better understand the current knowledge that a student possesses. This implies that assessment can be as simple as a teacher's subjective judgement based on a single observation of student performance, or as complex as a five-hour standardised test. Evaluation can be defined as the systematic gathering of information for the purpose of making decision (Bachman, 1990; Weiss, 1972). Subjective judgement exercised in evaluating writing may affect the validity and reliability of these measurements. The two terms are often used inter-changeably in the literature and so are in this paper where the whole evaluation process, both the specific phase and the decision or judgement, is emphasised.

The Value of Composition Writing

Before the role of evaluation of writing, the value of composition writing itself must be discussed. Writing is often considered one of the four language skills that must be developed and integrated together with speaking, reading and listening. Writing skills are a type of cognitive skill. Writing is viewed as a specific form of problem solving, within the general theory of problem solving as described by Newell and Simon (1972). In other words, writing is viewed as a process. In this process, the writers need to take the information that they have found and use it to plan their writing to meet the specific purposes of writing. This process involves the writers in decision making and becoming independent thinkers. Hayes and Flower (1980) both agree that almost every study on the subject of writing considers writing as a problem-solving activity consisting of a number of cognitive processes. Similarly, White (1985) views writing as a powerful instrument of thinking because it provides students with a way of gaining control over

their thoughts. Greenberg (1985) points out that students are often unaware of the power of the written word, yet the written word: "... enables the writer, perhaps for the first time, to sense the power of ... language to affect another. Through using, selecting and rejecting, arranging and rearranging language, the student comes to understand how language is used " (p. 15).

In higher education, term papers, theses or research reports are written forms of communication that play an important role in the curriculum. It is for this reason that the writing skill forms the focus of this paper. Skill in writing can be described as the component, functional, efficient use of written language as appropriate in a given context. The development of this skill is more urgent for non-native English speakers. The need stems from the fact that ESL students are often unable to demonstrate their true competence in other subjects because they lack the necessary language skills to understand the lessons or produce written or oral work. Thus, they need to be given time to develop their skills in English before their achievement can be assessed by the criteria used for other students. Such ability to use language properly, effectively, and persuasively is a basic skill needed throughout their academic career and beyond. With this ability, ESL students are likely to be more productive.

Writing is also emphasised for another reason: growth in ability to express oneself in writing will carry over into oral production. According to the most familiar model within the cognitive approach, developed by Hayes and Flower (1980), writers complete planning, formulating, and revising in the writing process. This process is a highly complex method of communication that requires the integration of linguistic and conceptual ability. In this process, writers are provided the opportunity to communicate in a new language and allowed to use skills for actual communication rather than just the completion of drills or exercises. For example, a writer should consider many things simultaneously such as his or her readership, setting clear

goals, phrasing sentences and balancing argumentative structure. Because basic language skills are interrelated, ability to express oneself in writing surely promotes oral communication. Gaudiani (1981) in advocating her successful second language composition approach states "Emphasis on writing improves foreign language learning".

Furthermore, writing may improve reading ability. Before writing an essay, a report or a term paper, writers are frequently obliged to carry out a literature review. This requires close investigation of external sources like books, articles, and other forms of information. Kennedy (1985) studied the behaviour of students who based their writing assignment on source materials and found that the quality of their written products depended in part on the way in which they studied the sources. Students who read and studied the written sources more thoroughly, also engaged in more planning than their less able counterparts. More recent research (e.g., Rasberry, 1997) shows good writers read more actively: they underline text and write comments. They seem to interact with the author(s) whose texts they are reading. That is, a language is an interrelated system, and any learning of language for any but most trivial purposed requires that one learn something about a great many parts of the system (Oller, 1983). Writing is visible proof of the students' progress in deriving meaning from the text and in expressing themselves in a second language.

The Role and Extent of Evaluation

In this section, I explore the role of evaluation and the extent of evaluation with the focus on identifying differences between holistic and analytic scoring system.

The Role of Evaluation

Having established the value of writing in second language learning, the role of evaluation

must be examined. A single score may be viewed as visible proof of the students' progress. I argue that evaluation is not just an end but also a new starting point for students; evaluation is often considered as a diagnostic tool. Based on the literature review, the following points are covered in this section: evaluation to meet ESL students' needs, the impact of evaluation on the intention of the student, and how evaluation leads to a re-examination of the approach adopted by both teachers and students in their teaching and learning process.

Evaluation to meet ESL students' needs: Dietel, Herman and Knuth (1991) suggest that the role of evaluation and assessment has the following purposes: to perform individual diagnosis and prescription, to monitor student progress, to carry out curriculum evaluation and refinement, to provide mastery or promotion or grading and other feedback, to motivate students, and to determine grades. Research shows that even though many non-native speakers may have good accents and be able to converse freely, such conversation ability may not always apply to their writing (Gaudiani, 1981). They may need to help understanding their writing problems. Research investigating various aspects of ESL writing instruction has demonstrated that students expect and value their teachers' feedback on their writing (McCurdy, 1992). In their study, Fathman and Whalley (1990) demonstrate that students' revisions improve in overall quality and in linguistic accuracy when they receive comments and /or corrections on both the content and form of their essays.

The impact of evaluation on the students' intention: The students' intention when beginning a writing assignment is largely determined by the motivation provided (Biggs, 1988). The degree of personal attention students receive, the amount of time the teacher spends on presenting and discussing the assignment, and the teacher's body language are all clues which convey to the student how much importance the teacher attaches to the assignment. As a

reference, the teacher consequently has a significant impact on the intention of the student. Reid

(1993) notes that the ESL writing teacher plays several different roles, among them, coach, judge,

facilitator, evaluator, interested reader, and copy editor.

Evaluation and teaching and learning processes: Coelho (1998) agrees that continuous

(e.g. formative) assessment is vital in order that teachers gain a clear, reliable picture of how

students are progressing and how well the methods of instruction address students' needs. It is

also important that the students themselves see how they are progressing and what they need to

work on. The amount of time and effort teachers spend in providing written and /or oral feedback

to their students suggests that teachers themselves feel that such response is a critical part of their

job as writing instructors (Perkins, 1983).

My experience as an ESL student makes me feel that a fair evaluation is not only

important to help ESL students know where problems exist, but also to motivate them in writing.

When I have struggled to produce a piece, I find it painful to go back to it. I usually do not want

to remove any of the text I have so painstakingly produced. I am willing to add new text but not

take any away, because it is natural that I have written what I could, with the English I had, and

working more on it might take me into areas I do not have the English for. I find some other ESL

students also have such a tendency. An unfair evaluation may lessen students' motivation as well

as teachers' teaching effect. So how can the teacher help ESL students overcome this problem

and continue to improve their writing? A fair evaluation from the teacher is important to help

students perceive both their progress and problems so that the ESL student can feel satisfied with

what they are asked to delete or change. They may view a score as a starting point from which

they make efforts to improve their writing. Evaluation serves as a tool to facilitate and monitor

their writing process. The student's motivation can be exploited by a fair evaluation.

For both teachers and students, evaluation is like a mirror which reflects and thereby reminds them of what they have done. White (1985) makes an excellent statement about evaluation in the following:

> The consideration of goals and ways of approaching those goals that evaluation demands is a formative activity: it asks those teaching writing to consider what they are doing and why; the gathering of information for an evaluation is itself a valuable activity; it not only makes those producing the information see it with new eyes, but it makes statements about the importance of information being collected. (p. 214)

Fair evaluation positively affects the students' motivation and represents a means to help the teacher know how to teach better. That is to say not only students themselves but also teachers can benefit from this activity.

The Extent of Evaluation

One of the goals of second-language learning is to grow in the ability to communicate clearly, and writing competence is a skill that is integral to effective communication. Two crucial questions for any model of composition evaluation and assessment are what will be evaluated and how the evaluation will be conducted. Determining the best method for measuring writing ability is essential to the educational process. I believe that the traditional grading of papers, which is based on grammar and vocabulary, still has a legitimate place in the English language arts classroom but should not be the sole means of assessing writing. The extent of evaluation discussed here consists of the two most prominent ways of evaluating and assessing English writing: holistic scoring and analytic scoring. Analytic scoring is more "traditional" since it

emphasises the individual elements of writing such as grammar or vocabulary. To analyse these two approaches, based on the review of the literature and my personal experience, I shall broaden this discussion to address the two research questions posed in this paper.

Part Two

Question 1

What are the common evaluation and assessment approaches for ESL writing in relation to syntax, structure, content or meaning?

The current interest in assessment is the recognition of the numerous assessment tools available to raters in order to respond to our students, especially ESL students. Wothen and Sanders (1987) have discussed those numerous assessment tools available to develop a new assessment system made up of multiple assessments. Recognising the complexity of understanding performance or success for individuals, Winking (1997) argues that it is virtually impossible for any single tool to fairly assess student writing performance. The National Centre for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (1996) suggests that this assessment system made up of multiple assessments, including norm-referenced or criterion-referenced assessments, alternative assessments and classroom assessments, can produce "comprehensive, credible, dependable information upon which important decisions can be made about students, districts, or states"(see URL in reference). Koelsch, Estrin, and Farr (1995) note that multiple assessment indicators are especially important for assessing the performance of ethnic-minority and language-minority students because "a combination of assessments that work together as part of a comprehensive assessment system can assess all students equitably within the school community" (p. 55).

Winking (1997) comments on tools which range from standarized fixed-response tests to alternatives such as performance assessment, exhibitions, portfolios, and observation scales. These tools are generally categorised into three types of evaluation: (a) diagnostic; (b) formative; and (c) summative. From a contemporary cognitive perspective, meaningful learning is reflective, constructive, and self-regulated; this paper focuses on formative evaluation and assessment methods which take place continuously and teachers make ongoing assessment a regular and informal part of the language learning classroom. Writing is viewed in development. Holistic and analytic scorings can be formative activities.

Holistic Scoring

In this approach, teachers read compositions for a general impression and, according to this impression, award a numerical score or letter grade. All aspects of the composition, including both content and conventions, affect the teacher's response, but none of them is specifically identified or directly addressed using a checklist. Since a holistic assessment can be achieved fairly reliably and rather quickly and hence inexpensively (White, 1985), it is quite widely used and is very valuable in determining whether there has been an improvement in the overall quality of composition in a particular class or school. Like in reading, listening and speaking, the value of using holistic scoring in writing lies in a few aspects: to establish a baseline score to show the student's growth from the beginning to the end of a course, to give teachers and students an instrument for comparing the achievement of writing, and to encourage the development of study groups that meet routinely to score papers. Holistic evaluation may be influenced by a number of characteristics of an essay, including content, organisation, sentence structure, and mechanics. Research, Evaluation and Testing (1999) points out that content and organisation have the greatest influence on holistic scores (see URL in references).

This approach is rapid and efficient in judging overall performance. It may, however, be inappropriate for judging how well students applied a specific criterion or developed a particular form. White (1985) states that the most important limitation of the holistic score is that it gives no meaningful diagnostic information beyond the comparative ranking it represents; such evaluation can, therefore, be highly subjective due to markers' bias, fatigue, and previous knowledge of the student, and /or internal lack of consistency and shifting standards from one paper to the next. Therefore, holistic scoring requires balancing a writer's strengths and weaknesses in the various components. In other words, holistic scoring's reliability is based on the consistency of evaluation standards. People are different. In reality, such a bias is difficult to avoid completely.

Published research on holistic scoring in terms of reliability and concurrent validity has yielded contradictory findings. Braddock, Loyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963) have reported interrater reliability coefficients as high as 0.90. Similarly, Kaczmarek (1980) found that subjective teacher judgements had substantial reliability estimates and strongly correlated with independent readers and with objective scores. However, other research has shown that professionals, including English teachers, vary in their assessment of attained writing proficiency. The research of Remondino (1959), Diederich (1961) and Diederich (1974) is most noteworthy. Diederich (1961) reported a study in which sixty professionals were asked to grade 300 papers written by college freshmen from three different schools. Diederich (1974) notes that "Out of the 300 essays graded, 101 received every grade from 1 to 9, 94 percent received either seven, eight, or nine different grades; and no essay received less than five different grades from fifty-three readers" (p. 5). Zamel (1985) criticizes the responding behaviours of teachers, on the grounds that ESL writing teachers rarely make content-specific comments or offer specific strategies for

revising the text. Thus, holistic scoring in writing is not enough. More than one assessment method should be used to ensure comprehensive and consistent indications of student performance (Winking, 1997).

<u>Analytic Scoring</u>

In analytic scoring of compositions, one might, for example, be able to say that the punctuation is poor (or good), the sentence construction is not so good, and the development of the ideas is unclear. Each dimension is given its own rating, independent of the other dimensions. Because the specific features are rated independently, the analysis can provide precise feedback and is often used to gain prescriptive and diagnostic information, unlike holistic scales, which provide a general, overall picture. Cooper (1977) has commented on the use of analytical scores for two types of writing evaluation:

> For program evaluation for research on methods of teaching writing, an analytical scale can serve as a guide to raters choosing the better of each student's paired pre-and post-essays on matched topics of the same kind of discourse (O'Hare 1973; Odell 1976). Where a criterion measure is required in a research study, raters can use an analytical scale to score each student's writing. (p. 17)

Although analytic scales can be used for various purposes in writing evaluation, they are not cost-free. Developing an analytical scale is a time-consuming procedure. It tends to be quite complicated for readers, which leads to slow scoring, which in turn leads to high cost. Another big weakness is that the features to be analysed are isolated from context and are scored separately. A sample analytic scoring by Cooper and Odell is provided in Figure 1 (see

Appendix A). White (1985) views Cooper and Odell's analytic scale as among the best of such devices with its virtues of simplicity and a certain amount of clarity. Nonetheless, White points out that the scale is time consuming since it requires the evaluator to make eleven separate judgements about a piece of narrative writing and to make such distinctions as that between "wording" and "usage".

White (1985) thinks analytic scoring offers some valuable adjunct measures of some kinds of skills but is not a useful or valid measurement of writing overall. Its promise of producing diagnostic information has not yet been demonstrated successfully with large numbers of papers. Since analytic scoring solves neither the reliability nor the cost problem, it is not a likely candidate to replace holistic scoring. As well, Devis, Scriven and Thomas (1987) argue that there is some evidence to suggest that holistic evaluation can be more reliable than analytic evaluation, i.e., the total evaluation is based on the theory that a whole piece of writing is greater than the sum of its parts. So one must not assume that diagnostic evaluation is always better; it is better for some formative purposes, not in general.

Although holistic and analytical scoring methods differ sharply in their implied assumptions about writing, they reflect a similar understanding of teaching: Since a teacher cannot do everything at once, writing instruction must deal with specific features of writing, much of the time. Since the teacher may be dealing with aspects of sentence structure one week and concepts of audience the next, there is a clear need for a scoring system that reflects this inevitable change of focus of pedagogy. If a class, or an entire program, stresses certain matters in relation to writing, a responsible measurement device also will emphasizes those matters.

Overall, in writing evaluation, it is unjustifiable to declare either of the two approaches, holistic or analytic, dominates the writing evaluation. It is impossible for any single tool to fairly

assess student writing performance (Winking, 1997). The balance of using two approaches, holistic and analytic, is suggested here. Moreover, it is also important to determine in advance the assessment objective -- language or content? Or both ? In some classes, it is natural for the teacher to specially focus on certain aspects. For example, in the Ed1020 class I talked about at the beginning of this paper, the teacher's evaluation tended more to individual elements like grammar mistakes and inaccuracy of the use of vocabulary. So in this case, it is important to separate language issues from subject-area concepts. Short (1993) has provided us with a good guide for selecting assessment tools in which both language and content are emphasized (see Appendix B). We may find from this matrix that some overlap will occur between language and content distinctions when some objectives, such as certain problem solving activities, require that language (oral or written) be demonstrated. The overlap can be clarified, however, by varying the assessment alternatives and categorizing the objective areas for assessment, as in the divisions in Appendix B. The key is to select the type(s) of assessment carefully and to focus consistently on the objective (Short, 1993).

Therefore, the first and most critical step in assessing ESL writing with equity is determining the purpose for assessing and using tools and strategies to reflect the purpose. It is also important to understand the special needs of ESL writers because different ESL writers have different cultures, experiences, prior knowledge, and language practices.

Part Three

Question 2

How can an optimal model be developed to incorporate the best features of a fair and accurate measurement for ESL writers?

Methods of assessment are determined by our beliefs about learning. The two types of subjective scoring systems discussed above, holistic and analytic, introduce myriad measurement concerns. The literature shows that research on the writing process and the evaluation of its products does not offer explicit formulas or definitive guidelines. The idea of current knowledge implies that what a student knows is always changing and that we can make judgements about student achievements through comparison over a period of time. Assuming that the goal of second-language learning is to grow in the ability to communicate clearly and with increasing maturity, such a goal requires the development of an optimal model for composition evaluation to incorporate the best features of the above-mentioned literature. The goal of the model is to make both writing and correcting a positive experience that will promote growth in the target language. Writing at different levels has different requirements and evaluation criteria. I shall focus on advanced academic writing in this section.

Writing assessment can take many forms and should take into account both product and process. In process assessment, teachers monitor the process students go through as they write. In product assessment, teachers evaluate students' finished compositions. In both types of assessment, the goal is to help students become better and more confident writers. Learning is an ongoing process; writing evaluation and assessment should be conducted continuously throughout this process. The components of such a model will be discussed one by one in the following steps: (a) encouragement and specific positive feedback on the initial effort; (b) defining evaluation objectives clearly at the beginning of the course, module, and learning experience; and (c) embracing fair and equitable assessment and evaluation.

<u>Encouragement and Specific Positive Feedback on the Initial Effort</u>

Positive feedback should be the first response of the teacher to the student's writing. Here

are a student's comments on a teacher's feedback:

> I can't think of any way Jill could really improve her teaching. She was absolutely
> wonderful (The best English teacher I have ever had). She just built my confidence so
> much in the little compliments she gave me and by the comments she sometimes wrote
> on my papers. (Thanks so much, Jill!)

> (Fall 1993, freshman composition, see online site)

Positive feedback is very important on the student's initial effort. Researchers have found that constructive, encouraging, and frequent feedback, as well as responses that emphasise content and process rather than just conventions help lead to improved competency and positive attitudes to writing (Cardell and Corno, 1981, Chastain, 1980). One study (Hedgcock and Lefkowiz, 1994) reported a more complex finding: EFL students paid more attention to form, whereas ESL students were as interested in teacher feedback on content as they were in sentence-level comments and corrections. Ferris (1995) argues that this result may be due to the fact that whereas foreign language students do second language writing as a form of language practice, ESL students must use their writing skills for all of their academic endeavours. The literature also suggests that praising what students do well improves their writing more than does mere correction of what they do badly and that teachers should focus students' attention on one or two areas for concentration and improvement (Hendrickson, 1978). Evaluation of output should be viewed as a way to show students their achievement as well as their problems.

In addition to positive feedback, specific feedback is important for creating an atmosphere which encourages students to experiment with new constructions, an essential

element of language. In Sommers' study (1982) of comments by professors on student papers, one of the findings is that if professors' comments are not text-specific, in fact, they could be put anywhere on any paper. In other words, if suggestions or feedback from the teacher are not specific but general comments, it is not so helpful to students, because students need to be informed what they need to do in order to improve. That is to say the teacher should not comment on mechanical errors on the first draft but provide comments that force students to rethink or clarify their position on an issue. According to Ferris (1995), ESL students are more likely to pay close attention to their teachers' advice on "how to do" than in a situation in which they are merely receiving a graded paper with comments and corrections to apply to a completely new essay assignment. To meet such needs, the teacher should respond to the quality of the writing; that is, specifically point out one well-developed, correct sentence or note a new, particularly difficult structures that a student has tried and (almost) mastered. The teacher's feedback is intended to help the students understand how to learn and make informed decisions about the kind of instruction that they need in order to help them to move towards expected outcomes or standards. It is important for teachers to avoid using only "red circles," rather they should indicate the error in the margin to help students identify the type of error. This step is essential to guide students in successful problem-solving activities designed to correct errors and to rewrite. It is also important for teachers to realise that the sensibilities of the individual student should be respected; his or her attitude to the nature and correction of errors may influence the approach. Some students will regard a critical comment as a challenge that spurs them on to better work, while others are discouraged by criticism. As much as possible, these considerations need to be balanced against maintaining common, appropriate standards. Rivers (1968) argued that more individual help in class is not always successful because the teacher usually ends up

giving too many answers rather than guiding the learning. A balanced response of praise and correction is supported in the research. According to Cardell and Corno (1981), teachers should "provide specific written feedback on homework assignments that identifies student errors, guide the student toward a better attempt next time and provide some positive comment on work particularly well done" (p. 260). A "follow-up questionnaire" at the end of a semester of writing is recommended to see if the teacher's feedback towards error can bring some positive changes in the student's writing (Leki, 1991). It is accepted that the feedback should be given as soon as possible so it reinforces positive achievement and capitalises on the students' immediate interest in their production.

In a word, assessment and evaluation should be constructive for each student. The teacher's feedback should be more intentional in explaining their responding behaviours to their students. Its aim is not to show the teacher's "privilege" or "authority" but to encourage students to write better. Clearly defined standards that are employed fairly can facilitate learning and show students that their teachers have high expectations and thereby encourage students to meet those expectations (Rose, 1991). Also specific and positive feedback are helpful.

Defining Evaluation Objectives

Another principle of writing evaluation is to define objectives clearly before choosing an evaluation approach. The students should be informed of the objectives of the program, the means of assessment, and the criteria to be met. Where possible, evaluation expectations should be developed in consultation with students. Dietel, Herman and Knuth, (1991) agree that successful solutions to evaluate the student's writing can only be achieved when objectives are clearly understood from every relevant perspective. It is better for the educator to ask a question: Has our evaluation clearly expressed the standards for the following aspects to the students

beforehand? These aspects are length and specificity of the task, communication of expectations, mode of discourse, specification of audience and purpose, number of samples to be written by one individual, and whether or not individuals should be given a set of topics from which to choose. What's more, it is also necessary to inform the student on what basis the evaluation will be conducted. In other words, selection of an appropriate scoring method for an ESL writing sample depends on the purposes of the assessment. For example, traditional evaluation and assessment relies on the individual elements of writing such as grammar and vocabulary. By contrast, authentic assessment directly examines student performance on worthy intellectual tasks.

Teachers of language minorities often must determine whether the language or the content is being assessed. These teachers must distinguish between the language and content knowledge of the students and decide if one is interfering with the demonstration of the other. Clearly, educators of language minority students grapple with this dilemma every day. The literature review (Short ,1993) shows that it is more advisable for teachers to focus on a single objective, be it content (e.g. topical, accurate, interesting) or language specific (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, spelling, topic sentences). The experience that ESL students bring to their writing may significantly alter their ability to produce a piece. Thus, the content implied by the writing topics must be as fair as possible, not favouring a specific set of personal or cultural experiences.

Going back to the English 1020 course I took in winter, 1999, I realise that the teacher used quantitative, or objective, scoring systems which are based on actual counts of specific characteristics. The most frequently used objective scoring systems include fluency, syntactic maturity, vocabulary, content, and conventions (Perkins, 1983). If the teacher had identified her evaluation and assessment objectives at the very beginning of that course, I would have known

exactly what I should focus on and I would have felt more confident in my efforts. It is important to determine what content, processes, and products will be emphasised in the course and in specific modules. It is also worth the effort to review the foundational objectives for the course and the specific learning objectives to be developed. Teachers' expectations for students' performance should be clear.

Adopting an Integrated Approach

Adopting an integrated and meaningful assessment method to ensure comprehensive and consistent indications of writing performance is important in a plural cultural classroom. Contemporary cognitive psychology suggests that learning is not linear, but that it proceeds in many directions at once and at an uneven pace (Byrnes, 1996). Current evidence about the nature of learning makes it apparent that instruction which strongly emphasises structured drill and practice on discrete, factual knowledge does students a major disservice. Learning isolated facts and skills is more difficult without meaningful ways to organize the information and make it easy to remember (Pressley and Levin, 1983). Recent researchers (Dietel et al. 1991, Wiggins, 1989, Winking, 1997) are turning to alternative assessment methods as a tool for education reform. Unlike the term traditional assessment I discussed in the earlier part of this paper, traditional tests with selection response items (e.g. cloze test) have been criticized as unfair to minority students because these students typically perform less well on this type of test than majority students (Lam, 1995). The movement away from traditional assessment to alternative assessments, which are variously called authentic assessment or performance assessment, has included a wide variety of strategies such as open-ended questions, exhibits, demonstrations, hands-on execution of experiments, computer simulations, writing in many disciplines, and portfolios of student work over time. These terms and assessment strategies have led the quest

for more meaningful assessments which better capture the significant outcomes we want students to achieve and better match the kinds of tasks which they will need to accomplish in order to assure their future success. To obtain a more complete picture of a student's knowledge, skills, attitude, or behaviours and discern consistent patterns and trends, more than one assessment method should be used.

Conclusion

Evaluation and assessment of writing serve as tools to facilitate the improvement of the ESL student's writing ability. They can also empower teachers by providing them with better instructional tools and a new emphasis on teaching more relevant skills. Good evaluation and assessment information have many characteristics like accuracy, validity, reliability or consistency, matched content with the teacher's educational objectives and instructional emphases, and clear expectations etc. Assessment methods should be free from bias by factors, such as culture, developmental stage, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic background, first language, special interests, and special needs. Cultural sensitivity ought to be a highly useful concept in second-language evaluation, for it reminds evaluators that they must not only be skilled in the theory and pedagogy of second language instruction but also reduce their personal biases to the least. This paper mainly discusses two topics: two common scoring methods for evaluating writing and an optimal second language composition evaluation model. Selection of an appropriate scoring method for an ESL writing sample depends on the purposes of the assessment. Two types of subjective scoring systems discussed above, holistic and analytic, belong to qualitative scoring which requires subjective, inferential judgements. The reality actually needs an adoption of a balance between these two approaches. A holistic evaluation (a

single score representing the overall impression created by the sample) may be more efficient for making a selection or placement decision, whereas a more analytic framework (separate scores for a number of organisational and grammatical features of the sample) may be more useful for providing diagnostic information to teachers and students. Since analytical scoring yields more specific scores than holistic scoring, it is potentially more valuable for prescribing educational interventions for individual students. However, the apparent advantage of several separate scores is frequently an illusion; the reader's general impression is likely to influence rating on each of the "separate" aspects being evaluated. Analytic scores can serve as helpful guides to provide feedback on each piece of writing submitted and as formative evaluation which is used to determine the degree of mastery of a given learning tasks and to grade or certify the learner. They can help the learner and the teacher focus upon the particular learning necessary for movement toward mastery (Bloom, 1971).

The literature review shows that further research is still needed to determine the best compromise between a single holistic score and a complex analytic scoring scheme, as well as which kinds of scores are more appropriate to specific situational contexts. Nevertheless, good assessment is recognised as that which reflects actual classroom practices not a one-time standardised exam. Even young students know that some of them simply do not do well on tests, often not because of a failure on their part to study or prepare. Because language performance depends so heavily on the purposes for which students are using the language and the context in which it is done, the importance of opportunity for flexible and frequent practice on the part of the students can not be overestimated. In the real world, most of us have more than one opportunity to demonstrate that we can complete tasks successfully, whether at work or in social settings. So, it makes sense to evaluate the students in an ongoing process.

The optimal second language composition evaluation model presented in this paper consists of encouraging specific positive comments by the teacher, defining evaluation objectives clearly before choosing any evaluation approach, and adopting an integrated, meaningful-based assessment methods to ensure comprehensive and consistent indications of writing performance. The basic purpose for evaluation is not only to measure the writers' progress and help them know where the problems are, but also to examine the teachers' teaching to see whether they have met the writers' needs or curriculum. Positive and specific feedback is embraced in this paper because of its importance in affecting the ESL writer's motivation. Defining evaluation objectives clearly before choosing any evaluation approach is emphasized in this model. On one hand, the evaluators can use a holistic or an analytic approach or both. On the other hand, writers should be told how they will be assessed and what they need to learn. This will help both writers and teachers to avoid going astray. The last but not the least suggestion recommended in this model is an integrated, meaning-based or authentic assessment because it can make sense to involve students in decisions about which pieces of their work to assess, and to assure that feedback is provided. This would involve language students in selecting and reflecting on their learning and give language teachers a wider range of evidence on which to judge whether students are becoming competent, purposeful language users. It also means that language programs would become more responsive to the differing learning styles of students. The greatest overall benefit of using authentic assessment is that the students are becoming independent thinkers, and the development of their autonomy as learners is facilitated. Furthermore, language programs that focus on authentic assessment are likely to instill in students lifelong skills related to critical thinking that build a basis for future learning, and enable them to evaluate what they learn both in and outside of the language class. In short, good assessment information should

provide accurate estimates of student performance, give students useful feedback, and enable teachers or other decision-makers to make appropriate decisions. So, the results of a good test or assessment should represent something beyond how students perform on a certain task or a particular set of items; they represent an ongoing process. It is hoped that use of this model will maximize growth in linguistic competence for the students and minimize frustration. Writing in a second language should be a positive experience for both students and teachers.

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Appendix A

Cooper and Odell's analytic scale

Read_____				Paper_____	
I. General Qualities	**Low**		**Middle**		**High**
A. Author's Role	2	4	6	8	10
B. Style or Voice	2	4	6	8	10
C. Central Figure	2	4	6	8	10
D. Background	2	4	6	8	10
E. Sequence	2	4	6	8	10
F. Theme	2	4	6	8	10
II. Diction, Syntax, and Mechanics					
A. Wording	1	2	3	4	5
B. Syntax	1	2	3	4	5
C. Usage	1	2	3	4	5
D. Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5
E. Spelling	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Cooper and Odell, 1977, p.24. Copyright 1977 by the National Council of Teachers of English.

Appendix B

Integrated Language and Content Assessment: What and How

	checklist inventory	Anecdotal record,teacher observation	student self-evaluation	portfolio	performance manipulation	written essays, report	oral reports	student interview
problem solving								
Content-area skills								
Concept comprehension								
Language use								
Communication skills								
Individual behavior								
Attitude								

Paper 3

Teaching ESL Writing and Technology:

Towards Computer-assisted Teaching

Introduction

Today the growing access to computers and computer networks changes the way educators think about what it means to write, to be a writer and to teach writing. Language arts teachers bring special insight to the ways technology may aid language acquisition. Writing is a time-consuming and exhausting activity considering the fact that the writer must put conclusions or ideas down on the paper in a coherent, logical fashion while simultaneously keeping an eye on the arrangement of the material, sentence structure, word choice and spelling. Therefore, the role of the computer in the English as a second language (ESL) writing classroom has attracted a great deal of interest from ESL educators. ESL educators wonder whether computers can facilitate their teaching of writing skills so that both the teacher and the student can benefit from such integration.

This paper presents the results of a review of the literature questioning whether and to what extent computers can be used as a means of instruction for the guided acquisition of communicative writing skills and the technical aspects of the writing process. The paper seeks to answer a question: Can writing skills be better taught using computer-assisted instruction in ESL classrooms than the traditional face-to-face instruction?

To answer this question, I organize the paper in two parts. In part one, I discuss the theoretical rationale for computer-assisted writing, and the nature of writing which I think can help better evaluate the functions of computers in the ESL writing classroom. In part two, I mainly discuss the use of word processors and electronic mail (e-mail) to see whether and how these two functions of the computer in the ESL writing classroom can relieve teachers of certain duties associated with writing instruction, and whether the student can perform tasks better in such computer-assisted writing settings. Conclusions from the analysis of the relevant literature

review, in general, suggest that using computers, especially word processing and email functions, benefits ESL performance in writing both in qualitative and quantitative aspects. At the end of this paper, I suggest that educators must take an active role in determining how computers should be used and what technology should be used as a means to promote improvements in second language instructional methods.

Part One

Rationale

In recent years studies by Pennington, 1996; Phinney and Khouri, 1993; Meagher, 1995; Sun, 1999 have been conducted on the use of computers by non-native English learners. As a non-native English speaker, I am eager to know whether computers can facilitate non-native English speakers in their ESL writing class and whether ESL students hold positive attitudes towards using computers to compose in their writing class. I provide a detailed discussion of findings I have gathered from the literature in the hope that ESL educators can benefit from this research.

I am interested in computer-assisted writing for a very practical reason: Writing is a difficult and time-consuming task. Naturally there is much interest in computer aids that promise to ease the burden or improve the final product. Another reason for my interest is that research has found that ESL students have more anxiety towards writing than do other writers (Chaudron, 1988) and this anxiety can have a negative effect on second language learning (Horwitz and Young, 1991). Finally, I choose this topic because of my experience as a research facilitator in a project (see Footnote 1) which provided me with an opportunity to work with a group of adults learning literacy. In this facilitating process, I witnessed how the participants improved their

language and literacy acquisition through computer-assisted writing. Along with my review of the literature in this paper, I would like to contribute some "on-the-spot" reflections on the project to the readers.

In addition to the above, there is a need for both ESL educators and learners to study this topic. With the increasing use of computers in writing classes, the growing awareness in ESL educators involves reflecting not only on the way language works but also about the way language can be effectively taught and learned. Cooper and Selfe (1990) state that the biggest challenge teachers face today in connection with computers is not that of using the technology itself but rather that of using technology to make a difference in classrooms.

These reasons motivate my investigation of the research literature and my interest in this topic. However, before going directly to the research question, the paper will discuss the nature of writing.

The Nature of Writing

A writing product is one physical embodiment of human beings' conscious feelings or thinking; the writing process is a type of cognitive skill (Pennington, 1996) which affects this product. Writing is also viewed as a process (Hayes and Flower, 1980) and a specific form of problem solving, within the general theory of problem solving as described by Newell and Simon (1972) and Hayes and Flower (1980). Bereiter and Scardamalia (1985) claim that it is important to examine the current models of writing because such an examination can tell you different processes involved in writing. Based on an examination of how students write essays, the findings on this issue can be grouped into three main processes engaged in by writers: drafting, revising, and formatting. Pennington (1996) explores this process approach and claims that knowing a

language is not only learning rules and vocabulary, but also knowing how to put them together into a system which functions for communication.

Learning to write in a second language is both an unconscious process of acquiring the relevant knowledge and skills and a conscious process of learning. The activities carried out during the writing process and the quality of the written product are determined to a large extent by the writer's intention. To view a writing assignment as a compulsory task is quite different from being actively involved in the activity and from viewing the writing assignment as a learning experience of problem solving. These different attitudes will definitely lead to different writing activities, even at the beginning of the planning and revision phases. The process approach to teaching composition to non-native learners is intended to encourage them to move in a steady progression through the writing stages of drafting, revising and formatting, with input and assistance from teachers and other students in each stage. The basic purpose of using a computer is to improve the output of humans in terms of efficiency, quantity, and /or quality.

Part Two

A number of researchers (e.g. Hyland, 1993; Pennington, 1996; Tsui, Wu and Sengupta, 1996; Peterson, 1997; Warschauer, 1999; and Sun, 1999) have conducted observational studies to determine the effects of the computer in the ESL writing process. Two aspects of computer use have been mainly discussed in the works of these researchers: word processing and use of the Internet. Among various Internet resources, World Wide Web (WWW) media has been welcomed by ESL educators and learners since it provides a rich resource of study sites such as up-to-date links to foreign newspapers, electronic journals, popular culture exhibits, and other objects or activities relating classroom teaching to real life. Without repeating the "advantages"

of WWW, this paper will focus on discussing the functions of computer in ESL writing activities in the other two areas, word processing and email.

Word Processor

Myers (1985) claims that the computer program that has the greatest effect on writing in general is word processing software, although the Internet is playing an important role in writing. Researchers generally agree that the word processor facilitates the process of writing and revising as "writers can insert, delete, and substitute text with an ease hitherto unknown" (Hawisher, 1987: p.145). For example, Hyland (1993) claims that word processors "maximize opportunities for changing text which means they provide a perfect environment for language learning"(p. 22). This is said to encourage writers to explore language and experiment with different means of expression and organization (Hawisher, 1987 ; Blanton, 1987). Research into the use of word processors has uncovered positive results in terms of revision, overall writing quality, and insight into the writing process itself (Collin & Genter, 1980; Geest, 1986; Schwartz, Geest & Smit-Kreuzen, 1992). Besides the positive impact on writing assignments in general, various researchers have pointed out the specific advantage of word –processing programs in revising texts. The programs make it easy to delete, replace or enter words, change the spelling, and shift around sections of text. The writer consequently spends less time repeatedly rewriting the text and can concentrate more on overall text quality (Collins & Genter, 1980; Van der Geest, 1986; Schwartz et al., 1992).

The computer assists English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to write much more quickly, efficiently, and effectively than they could with human resources alone (Johnson, 1991). A review of studies (e.g., Kamisli, 1992; Kaplan, 1991; Lam & Pennington, 1995; Phinney,

1991) showing positive effects indicates that word-processing produces more educational benefits for ESL writers than for first language writers. Research shows ESL students have more anxiety toward writing (Chaudron, 1988). Lam and Pennington (1995) argue that the networked classroom offers the less proficient speaker more time to think about what to "say", thus reducing anxiety and the probability of error. Computer terminals through email or word processing also offer ESL students an impersonal vehicle through which to practice the target language, especially when all learners are of the same native language background and are apprehensive about speaking the target language with peers (McCrosky, Fayer & Richmond, 1985). This is because second language writers have more causes for apprehension than do native writers. Most second language writers, especially in university ESL classes, are expected to compete with native speakers eventually (Phinney, 1991). The research findings have supported the advantages of using networked computers for writing that allow real-time interaction but not necessarily visible to other members of class (e.g., Cooper & Selfe, 1990; Spitzer, 1989).

The benefits attributed to word processing can be classified as falling into four areas of positive effects on ESL writing: (a) quality of written work, (b) quantity of writing (c) writing process such as drafting, revising and formatting behavior, and (d) affective or social outcomes. Each of these effects will be examined in detail in what follows.

Quality of Written Work

Evidence of positive effects in the quality of written work when word processing is employed comes from studies reporting higher holistic ratings of compositions (Kitchin, 1991); and higher analytic rating in categories such as organization, content, and language (Lam & Pennington, 1995; McGarrell, 1993). Pennington (1996) also thinks that with more time non-native writers may produce not only a broader but possibly a deeper treatment of their topic than

the traditional pen-and-paper based writing; that is, computer-assisted writing sets up the conditions for non-native speakers to potentially improve, not only the quantity, but also the quality, of the ideas.

Quantity of Writing

Other measures of the effects of the word processor focus on outcomes related to quantity of writing. Several investigations (Pratt & Sullivan, 1994; Phinney, 1991; Phinney & Khouri, 1993) have found that more time is spent in ESL writing and longer compositions are written when the word processor is employed. Pennington (1996) argues that improved writing quality may therefore ultimately be an effect of the ease and enjoyment of writing on the computer which encourages ESL students to write more and to stay with a topic longer.

Johnson (1988) and Poulsen (1991) comment, based on their research evidence, that greater experimentation with language and a more flexible or fluid writing process occur when the writing medium is word processing.

Writing Process

Research on the word processor also demonstrates positive quantitative and qualitative effects in the three subprocesses -- drafting or planning, revising and formatting behavior of writers in the model developed by Linda Flower and John Hays (e.g., Carey & Flower, 1989; Flower & Hayes, 1980 & 1984; Hayes, 1996).

Drafting. The key to developing ideas on a word processor is rapid drafting (Hyland, 1993). This not only assists poor handwriters, but also helps users think and work quickly in a non-linear way, removing the apprehension created by the need to produce clear, accurate prose at the first attempt. In a 10-week comparative study of the writing of a computer-using and a non-computer using group of ESL university students conducted by Chadwick and

Bruce (1989), the latter group, perhaps anticipating the time-consuming and burdensome non-productive work of revising manually, spent more time thinking and planning before writing than did the group of computer users. In contrast to the considerable restructuring of the writing task by the pen-and-paper writers, "there was a move towards a more flexible approach by the [computer-using] group, in the sense that they now have ease of revision in mind before they started writing " (Chadwick & Bruce, 1989: p. 11). Similar findings emerge from the research of Bridwell, Johnson and Brehe (1987), Hass and Hayes (1986), and Lutz (1987).

This drafting process is encouraged in a number of ways. Brainstorming and focused freewriting are excellent computer techniques, as the speed of keyboard writing allows a train of thought to be followed rapidly, while cut and paste and windowing enable key ideas to be grouped, compared and organized into a logical sequence. Such a focused writing and brain-storming environment allows the ESL writer to put down a great quantity of ideas in written form before they are forgotten or altered in short-term memory. Phinney (1989) thinks that lowering screen brightness can help prevent corrections interfering with output by eliminating immediate visual feedback (Marcus, 1984). The menu bar in the word processor can set up headings for an outline in large bold letters. Later when writers go back and fill in the subheadings and subpoints, they will be able to see the larger structure of the paper. In addition to its function as a writing implement, the word processor, in the form of a blinking cursor on the computer monitor promoting the user to act, also serves as a physically present "audience" (Daiute, 1985), or stimulus, to begin and to continue writing.

Revising. With the ability to allow students to make endless changes to their texts without rewrites, the word processor encourages revision and recursive activity, performed at any point in the writing process on any text segment for any purpose. Several effects have been reported in the

amount of revision done as a result of word processing, including a greater number and variety of revisions overall (Chadwick & Bruce, 1989; Johnson, 1988; Lam, 1991; Phinney & Khouri, 1993); greater quantity of meaning-related or deep-level revision (Chadwick & Bruce, 1989; Pennington & Brock, 1992); and fewer surface-level errors in compositions (Green, 1991; Hyland 1993). Pennington (1996) echoes that the repeating cycle of physical and mental acts engendered by computer use can become a self-reinforcing, recursive psychomotor process. According to Pennington, the use of a word processing capability may stimulate the generation and creative exploration of ideas through written language and so be a valuable aid in the writing process.

A variety of word processor features assist the development of economical expression and good style. For example, the spell checker and grammar checker encourage proof reading for sense and develop an awareness of readability such as if there are too many passives in the common style writing; the word counter promotes succinctness by enabling writers to meet precise word limits; and the feature of word-processing that brings writers to the beginning of the document each time upon opening the file can provide more opportunities for ESL writers to read the document until they come to a section where they will be working. In reality, not all students view revision as a basic and positive component of writing; many see revision as punishment for not getting something right the first time (Walz, 1982). As a result, sometimes instructors are reluctant to ask students to make numerous revisions. In computer-assisted writing classes, instructors ask students to revise essays repeatedly without having to feel guilty for making students go through the physical and mental drudgery of recopying an entire essay by hand (Glynn & Oaks, Mattocksand & Britton, 1989). By freeing students from the mechanical burdens of recopying, the word processor promotes a writing environment in which revision becomes easily

accomplished and is viewed as an integral part of the total composition process. An early enthusiast of computer-assisted writing, Schwartz (1984) claims that, with a computer, "writing becomes a playground where revising is part of the fun instead of part of the computer" (p. 240).

Formatting. Formatting strategies are essential to effective communication as they influence readability and reader motivation. Good presentation is important in signaling document structure, adding emphasis and achieving clear prose. Phinney (1991) finds that non-native English writers express more apprehension about editing, perhaps as a result of their grammar-based ESL experience and their tendency to overmonitor in English (Krashen, 1981). Daly & Miller (1975c) find negative correlations between level of such writing apprehension and willingness to take an advanced course in writing. The word processor is a palpable force in diminishing ESL writers' anxiety and in the shaping of student writing during all stages in the writing process by using subheads, spacing, different fonts and character styles, and tables for presenting information.

Affective or Social Outcomes

In addition to the literature about the benefits discussed above -- quality of written work, quantity of writing, and writing process -- research on word processing also supports a variety of affective or social outcomes related to computer use. Computer-assisted composition has recently been touted as a viable tool to help non-native English speakers reduce writing apprehension and blocking, and to improve student attitudes about writing (Phinney, 1991; Benesch, 1987; Chadwick & Bruce, 1989; Green, 1991; Kamisli, 1992; Neu & Scarcella, 1991; Pennington & Brock, 1992; Phinney, 1991; Piper, 1987; Silver, 1990); and more collaboration among ESL writers when considering equal access to the group's work without being hindered by schedule constraints (Johnson, 1986; Kamisli,1992; Paulsen, 1991, Peterson, 1997; Eldred, 1991). The

collaborative nature of networked computing fits well with the social view of writing (Eldred, 1989; Kaplan, 1991) and with the generally accepted view that interaction and group work facilitate the second language acquisition process (Long & Porter, 1985; McGroarty, 1991).

Although it is vital that we conduct research to determine whether or not, and how computers facilitate improvements in ESL students' writing skills, it is equally important that we attempt to ascertain whether or not the students themselves perceive that their writing benefits from their using word processing in the ESL computer class, and whether or not they find the computer laboratory to be a challenging and worthwhile place to work. The results of Neu and Scarcella's research (1991) suggest that ESL students do perceive the value of word processing. They also felt that word processing helps them pay attention to the mechanics of their writing. These positive attitudes toward writing on the computer should contribute to improving their writing abilities by increasing their willingness to rewrite (Neu & Scarcella, 1991).

<u>Electronic Mail</u>

Electronic mail (E-mail) as a very important medium has been well received by ESL educators and learners. A number of researchers have reported substantial benefits of using e-mail as a means of teaching a non-native writing course. Warschauer (1995, 1999) claims that exchange by e-mail between classes is one of the best uses of the Internet for teaching writing. Similarly, Sun (1999) also thinks that e-mail is an ideal tool for second or foreign language teaching and learning and that it has already changed the dynamic of language teaching and learning.

E-mail's advantages in helping non-native writing are substantiated by many researchers. Silva, Meagher, Valenzuela and Crenshaw (1996) present evidence in favor of the above beliefs

by observing e-mail messages from students in Mexico City, Spain and Florida. From their research results they stress that communicating via the Internet puts language students in contact with real audiences, providing them with authentic language experiences and immediate feedback from native speakers. Warschauer (1995) argues that shy foreign language students participate much more frequently in electronic discussions than in the traditional face-to-face classroom. Warschauer (1999) also specifically confirms his claims that the relative silence of Asian students (e.g. Japanese and Chinese students) in face-to-face classes can be ameliorated by electronic discussion. Pratt and Sullivan (1994) present evidence in their study that 100% of students participated in electronic discussions compared to 52% in face-to-face ones. Kern (1993) likewise finds that every student participated in electronic discussion whereas the face-to-face discussions were dominated by five students with four students not participating at all. A number of studies have been conducted comparing the pros and cons in face-to-face classrooms and computer-assisted classrooms. Peterson (1997) states that computer-mediated communication promotes learner autonomy, in that it provides a learning environment that is considered less restrictive than the traditional language classroom. This "free space" is perceived as more compatible with personal learning styles and encourages the learner to take control in the learning process (Cooper and Selfe, 1990)

Some unique features provided by e-mail communication that rarely happen in the traditional writing classroom can be summed up into three aspects of positive effects on ESL writing: (a) constructivism and collaborative learning; (b) meaningful and authentic audiences; and (c) a new teacher-student relationship

Constructivism and Collaborative Learning

Klemm and Snell (1996) claim that computer-assisted group learning can be strengthened by interaction through constructivist and collaborative approaches to learning. Constructivism (Duffy & Johnson, 1992; Brooks, 1993; Tobin, 1993) is premised on the idea that a student is an active learner who constructs a personal base of knowledge and understanding. In other words, the student does more than just "discuss" a topic. The best way to get students to learn to use and communicate in the target language is simply to have them communicate -- "learn by doing" (Sun, 1999; Hillesheim, 1993). "Learn[ing] by doing" is viewed as an important strategy in Sun's research (1999), which stresses that the teacher's sole involvement in the students' e-mail writing is not enough; learning by doing or learning by actually communicating with other learners in the target language is a crucial part of the language learning process.

Collaborative learning (Damon, 1984; Gabbert, Johnson, & Johnson, 1986; John & Johnson, 1989; Kadell & Keehner, 1994; Klemm, 1994; Webb, 1982) is premised on the idea that small, interdependent groups of students work together as a team to help each other. E-mail can be described as asynchronous conferencing, which also makes collaborative learning possible. Asynchronous conferencing enables an individual to post a message to many other users through participation in discussion lists or bulletin boards. Research (e.g., Tobin, 1993; Warschauer, 1995, 1990) shows that the collaborative interpretative discussion that takes place over electronic communication encourages students to be more reflective in their writing. Warschauer (1999) states that the use of e-mail and participation in conferencing removes the constraints of time, distance, specific times and locations, and learners may compose and respond to messages on their own initiative (Peterson, 1997). Silva, Meagher Valenzuela and Crenshaw (1996) and Warschauer (1999) echo and further analyze that E-mail communication is able to

turn the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students in the class from a potential dividing point into a real strength because they find that exchange between students from different cultures produces empathy among interlocutors. They also find that non-native English speaking students learn to express their ideas in the target language in terms that would be more culturally relevant to their distance friends. Warschauer (1995) thinks that by posting their findings through e-mail on the listserv, and evaluating their works within a publicized forum, ESL students can be motivated to engage in scholarly debates. The introduction of e-mail increases the involvement of students who, due to anxiety (Mabrito, 1991) or ability (Hartman, Neuwirth, Kiesler, Sproull, Cochran, Palmquist, & Zubrow, 1991), are the least likely to participate in traditional classrooms. Warschauer's research (1999) also indicates that computer-mediated communication may help involve students who in the past have been most shut out.

ESL teachers' collaboration is also enhanced in this authentic communication. Tsui, Wu and Sengupta (1996) comment: "It [E-mail] provides a platform for teachers to initiate cross-school collaboration, build confidence in themselves as autonomous professionals, and share reflections on their classroom practices with others, thus enhancing their collaborative and personal development" (p. 416). That is to say, a practical advantage of collaboration is that e-mail enables teachers to share teaching materials, teaching ideas, problems in teaching, and to learn from the experience of other teachers. In this way, teachers can gain a better understanding of themselves and awareness of issues related to English language teaching.

The purpose of using E-mail to aid ESL writers is not only to provide authentic writing experiences to connect them to the community, but also to make participants "more curious and motivated to learn", strengthen students' "ethic of social and civic responsibility," teach students

to "respect other cultures more," and help participants "realize that their lives can make a difference" (Kendall, 1977).

Meaningful and Authentic Audiences

E-mail exchanges provide foreign language students with authentic reasons for communicating in the target language and produce results not obtainable through other methods. Sun (1999) explains that real communication with real people is the best situation for ESL students. Silva, Meagher Valenzuela and Crenshaw (1996) point out: "Communicating via the Internet puts foreign language students in contact with real audiences, providing them with authentic language experiences and immediate feedback from native speakers" (p. 10). Based on these research findings and their own experiences, they claim that electronically-supported writing settings make it possible for ESL students to "recycle linguistic information"(p. 12) and to "interact repeatedly using the same grammatical structure and vocabulary which contributed to student success" (p. 12). They maintain that authentic activities may increase language acquisition. Brunner and Tally (1999) agree that students' writing skills are best practiced in this kind of real exchange and they progress more quickly than those using grammar-oriented textbooks in traditional settings (Meagher, 1993). Meagher's research (1995) also demonstrates that the quality of content and value judgments for ESL writing is improved in authentic email communication. These findings make sense because when people are writing to inform real people, it is natural for them to care about what they say and to work until they have learned the grammatical structures and vocabulary necessary to communicate their message. In fact, the student's higher order thinking skills are developed in the real conferencing. That may be the reason why Meagher (1995) maintains that the more relevant to the real world the writing is, the more motivated the students are to research, collaborate, and learn.

A New Teacher-Student Relationship

E-mail communication changes the roles of teachers and learners. As participation in e-mail communication encourages and produces increased learner interaction, the capacity of teachers to control discussion is reduced (Harasim, 1986). In this case it is not the teacher but the learner who decides what is communicated on computer networks. What's more, learners are more motivated to produce a form of authentic writing on the networked learning forum than when they do those pseudo-communicative exercises central to many teacher-based language classes. That means that such authentic discourse on computer networks reduces the students' reliance on teachers' management of classroom activities.

The shift of roles described above makes ESL students become more autonomous and the teacher more of a facilitator. The teacher, in this sense, should be someone who directs the students' learning process with a specific purpose in mind and gives students space to express their ideas and then helps students to discover how to learn English and how to use e-mail technology more effectively.

In Warschauer's research (1995), e-mail is confirmed to be particularly useful in large courses when discussion in the classroom is hard to begin and sustain. Because of the speed of e-mail, the instructor is more likely to respond to students' writing through e-mail. In this way, the act of writing is geared toward a larger audience and becomes a meaningful exercise in communicating each other. If a respondent misreads a particular argument, the author of the paper may finds new motivation for improving his or her work. The teacher in this situation may become more of a mediator and collaborator, and less of a critic and judge.

Personal Experience

The fast, easy and more conversation-like characteristics of e-mail make it possible for

writers to communicate more fluently and more fluidly. My belief in this phenomenon has been strengthened through my observation in a Community Resource Center where computer-based writing practice involves a key relationship with the participants' friends and relatives. One of the participants, Sherry, is a woman from Sri Lanka. English is her second language. Sherry is learning to use computers and she is simultaneously improving her English. I find that, technically, Sherry's writing in an e-mail message may be more casual than in the traditional pen-based writing; her writing sometimes has grammar or spelling mistakes, but technology permits a genuine ease of communication, especially for participants like Sherry who do not like to write, as she told me in a free chat. I notice that, as Sherry gets involved in an e-mail correspondence, she becomes more aware of the possibilities for communication and miscommunication in new ways. If a sentence in a message she receives is not clear, she likes to ask a question in her reply. If she gathers from a response that she has not made herself clear in a message, she can make a correction or an addition. Email exchanges can thus become a process of revision and clarification. Since the original messages can be logged, participants can look at an entire correspondence and identify problems of miscommunication and learn from them. This kind of telecommunication in fact provides the participants with an opportunity for problem-solving activities. Those problems are "gateways" (Silva, Meagher Valenzuela and Crenshaw, 1996: p.12) for the teacher to creative solutions that actually improve teaching.

Silva, Meagher, Valenzuela and Crenshaw (1996) have provided a good summary: " E-mail puts language students in contact with the language used for communication in real life and gives them access to information that empowers them " (p. 11). The utilization of the Internet as a virtual connector to foreign cultures, and the expansion of classroom communications into the e-mail forum, create entirely new dimensions for teaching and learning. The many applications of

the World Wide Web make it possible to link classrooms to language resources around the globe, to interact with students at other colleges who are taking similar courses, and to exchange ideas and critical insights through electronic discussion groups. Warschauer (1995) comments that these wide communicative nets, searching for contacts in foreign cultures around the globe, and the spectrum of voices from otherwise obscure individuals help us recognize our similarities and learn tolerance of our differences.

Conclusion

The question posed in this paper is whether writing skills can be better taught using computer–assisted instruction in ESL classrooms than the traditional face-to-face instruction. Most of the answers found in the research on computer-aided writing indicate the affirmative. First, word-processing programs provide unique help in the three-stage writing process of drafting, revising and formatting behavior of ESL writers. The specific advantages to students' text-revising process are particularly emphasized in the literature. They are more likely to take on the tasks of revising text in the first place. Most research I have seen on this subject confirms this positive effect (Chadwick & Bruce, 1989; Green, 1991; Hyland, 1993; Johnson, 1986; Lam, 1991; Pennington & Brock, 1992; Phinney & Khouri, 1993; Schwartz, 1984). The opportunities afforded by the computer for instruction in writing are well suited to the technical aspects of the writing process. Computer-assisted writing settings are more effective than others in facilitating component skills at the lower levels, such as spelling and sentence structure.

Second, using computers helps develop the writing and problem-solving skills of ESL students. The researchers (e.g., Sun, 1999; Warschauer, 1995, 1999; Peterson, 1997; Silva, Meagher, Valenzuela & Crenshaw, 1996; Brunner & Tally, 1999) mainly support this claim by

providing evidence on the use of E-mail in writing. Students experience a sense of being a "master" of the classroom because the network allows them ready access to all of the texts, theirs and teacher's, that comprise the course itself. The authentic communication settings encourage the writer to think and analyze real-world tasks.

Third, the attractiveness of working with computers may contribute to positive feelings about writing assignments (Schwartz et al., 1992) for those ESL writers who have no skill problem with computers. Part of such attractiveness stems from the proficiency and convenience provided by the computers. Writers can easily alter text, paste text, cut, delete, check spellings and add diagrams and tables. Students in the computer-assisted classroom not only demonstrated more interest in discussion and more practical writing English; they were also more focused on the task at hand than students in the traditional classroom. The writer's confidence is strengthened in such processes.

Fourth, researchers also agree that computer programs may relieve teachers, giving them more time to devote to activities other than lower level writing. A new teacher-student relationship is built in a computer-assisted ESL writing classroom. The teacher is more of a facilitator than an authority in class. In a word, the use of network computers has allowed the concept of "writing" to break out of the confines of narrow of "composing" and to become, instead, a natural and essential way of communicating in many and varied situations.

Finally and significantly, a reminder: ESL teachers should never assume that computer-assisted curricula are "teacher-proof". Rather, teachers need to take an active stand regarding what students will do with computers (Cazden, 1988). The computer is only a facilitating tool. What makes writing instruction human is what makes it effective, and no computer, no matter how friendly, can replace a human teacher. Thus, a teacher must build bridges between the tool,

the school task, the thinking skills, and their functional significance for the culture beyond the classroom (Newman, 1983), and second language teachers must build these bridges in ways that promote second language learning at the same time (Johnson, 1991).

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