

Approaching Academic Writing in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students find themselves at disadvantage when enrolled in writing classes, generally known as Com I, Com II, and even Advanced Comp. these classes are required students who do not test out of them. ESL and EFL students generally struggle in writing classes due to different proficiency levels and native tongue influence, even if they were taught formal English grammar, language drills and exposed to grammar translation pedagogy. Knowing grammar does not automatically translate into writing ability. This is also due to communicating in diverse language backgrounds. In general, in academic writing classes, students are dependent on the instructor and his/her perceptions on what constitutes academic writing, for the role of the instructor rests on preparing such students to write at levels required by their prospective major fields of study. The instructor, becomes the targeted audience, so students are writing for the instructor. This is, therefore, not grounded in the students' emotional needs. Students should be writing freely and in their own voice, so teachers should yield some of the control they exercise over student writing. Composition students prove to be successful when they are given their own space in guided free writing. Another issue involves assigned topics that do not relate to students' backgrounds and experiences. In general, the Composition/Writing classroom, which in many cases is multicultural, presents a challenge to both students and instructors. However, instructors should endeavor to cater to ESL/EFL student needs by giving up some of their control and allow for freewriting accompanied by student voice. Writing topics assigned, even though challenging, should be those students can handle, be interested in, and even relevant their respective cultures backgrounds.

Keywords: Writing Composition, ESL/EFL, Native Language, Personal Narrative, Free Writing, Voice

Introduction

It is a usual problem for most of the students in writing classes to struggle with writing projects, and the case is even more complicated with English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The issues related to writing sometimes originate from the fact that the topics offered to students as assignments are not as easy and interesting as they should be. Teachers are usually the only authority in the classroom, with little control given to students. Teachers should sacrifice some of the authority that they have to empower the students to control their own learning process. This practice would benefit both parties and enhance the whole learning environment. This paper looks at the benefits of investing in ESL students' experiences, discussions, and native languages as a break-away method from an entirely teacher-centric classroom.

Effect of Native Language Use

ESL students come from different English instruction backgrounds and stand at different levels of English proficiency and language use in a considerably wide continuum. Their learning environment can be either English or second language environment. Speakers of English as a second language (L2) have a native or first language (L1) that they usually speak, and these can vary wildly with respect to their similarities or differences with English and each other. This is worth bearing in mind, as the ways in which, and the degree to which a first language impacts the process of learning English will vary depending on language characteristics of the L1. In

1989, Odlin defined the notion of “transfer” as “... the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired.” For example, a student in India whose first language is Tamil may use English in certain specific situations. Another example is a student who has immigrated to an English-speaking country and tries to learn English within and outside of the classroom and use it more frequently in almost all settings. Despite these variations, most ESL students are taught the language through formalized teaching of grammar and application of that knowledge to out-of-context drills and exercises, and the language delivery method is highly dependent on the teacher. Therese Thonus laments the fact that ESL students do not receive a well-grounded and comprehensive English instruction for long enough to make them ready and confident enough to academically write and speak in English (Thonus, 1993).

All these students with different levels of proficiency and whose use of English is widely varied come to the classroom to learn how to, effectively and correctly, write in English. Academic writing is not an effortless assignment, but is one of the hardest skills to master, specifically to ESL students (Barkaoui, 2007). Students who try to write in a language that is not their native tongue tend to be more overwhelmed. Often, students tend to start the writing process by generating ideas in their native language, and work to translate their writing later in the process.

The act of translation from one language to another is very much a natural and spontaneous mental action of many individuals who are in contact with more than one language and is considered by some to be an aide in language learning (Berlin, 1988). Indeed, the notion of “Constructivism,” an educational method popular in Europe, relies on learners’ past experiences to construct present and future knowledge. Applied to language, L1 and L2 (second language) are inseparable, since mother tongue language (L1) is part of the individual’s construct and prior know-how” (Berlin, 1988). If this is the case, then it would follow naturally that, at least in the introductory period, the learner can only conceive of the L2 through its relation to the L1. Posen Liao’s case study about Taiwanese learners’ beliefs of using translation in learning English showed that learners in beginning stages of the language progression look highly to this strategy because it helped them with the skills and vocabulary and helped to reduce frustrations” (p. 51).

The “Grammar Translation Method” as this learning strategy is known, has not enjoyed universal approbation, and came under attack in the 19th century. Wilhelm Viëtor’s 1882 slogan “Der Fremdsprachenunterricht muss umkehren!” (“Language teaching must turn around”) epitomizes this demand for abandoning the grammar translation method. Language learners and teachers wanted a more “natural” way of teaching a language that favored language use in “authentic” situations over knowledge about language and explicit rule giving, spoken over written language, as well as opposing any ‘unnatural’ intrusion of a learner’s own language via translation (Cook, 2010). Despite the widespread popular assumption that translation should play a major and necessary part in the study of a foreign language, recent theories of language teaching and learning have at best ignored the role of translation, and at worst vilified it (Cook, 2010).

Cook (2010) lists several reasons why TILT (Translation in Language Teaching) was rejected: the widespread influence of the Grammar Translation method which has become synonymous with the use of translation in language teaching, the difficulty associated with translating from the L1 into the L2, the reinforcement of a reliance on processing the L2 via the L1, L1 interference as learners seemed to be heavily influenced by the L1 and, finally, a detrimental effect on the acquisition of native-like processing skill and speed (Cook, 2010). This is not to say that the method has no remaining adherents, however. Its value in assisting students in developing an understanding of the context in which certain terms and phrases can be used was emphasized by three of the respondents. For example, in response to the question as to why they engage with TILT, one replied that “in first and second year it can be helpful to contextualize the language use.” Similarly, three of the lecturers in this study spoke of the usefulness of TILT in ensuring that comprehension is occurring successfully with one commenting that they use it to “check comprehension and for extra confirmation.” Three lecturers further stressed that it increased their students’ familiarity with particular grammatical “structures in line with module learning outcomes,” while two of those interviewed emphasized the fact that students appear to enjoy explicit forms of TILT stating that, “The exercise is very popular among students and always features positively in their evaluations of the module.”

Finally, one lecturer also stressed the usefulness of translation as a pedagogical tool in highlighting gaps in learners’ knowledge, in particular with regard to vocabulary (Cook, 2010). Translation was an integral part of

English language teaching for a long time, but it has been abandoned since communicative methodologies became dominant (Cook, 2010).

Personal Narrative

Two of the primary factors affecting classroom dynamics are the communication between the instructor and the students, and the degree to which students are dependent on the instructor to learn the material, in this case, English academic writing. Any classroom may be considered an arena where diverse backgrounds and cultures render communication more difficult, and more important. In a language learning class, particularly one comprised of students speaking more than one L1, that intra-group communication is necessarily more difficult, and just as crucial. In the textbook, *What Is Sociolinguistics*, Van Herk (2013) reflects on the different views students bring to the classroom and how their language is a manifestation of the way they perceive the world. This cultural mix leads to the idea of a “Contact Zone,” where Pratt (1991) touches on the idea of having different cultures within one class, and defines such classes as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”

The other challenge is the extent of agency students can access when the class is firmly grounded in a pedagogy that is completely dependent on the teacher. Freire (1996) echoes the same standpoint and reprehended the fact of the “banking” concept of education,” (qtd. in Wong, 2016, p. 250) in which the teaching is only emitted from one source – from the teacher and to the students. The teacher’s role in the class guidance and management is undeniably crucial for the students to learn through a systematic education. That being said, learning is not a passive activity, and to ignore the student’s role completely in defining the process or determining success would be a miscalculation. In the simplest formulation, both the student and the teacher have “power,” which for the purposes of this paper, will be understood as defined by Weber (1978), that is “the probability that an actor will ‘carry out his own will despite resistance” (qtd. in Wong, 2016, p. 249). The question is whether these forces, in the pursuit of knowledge transmission, will be complementary.

The definition of “agency” in this context approaches the area where students regain the ownership of their learning. Students usually find it rewarding to have them “[as an] active part of the conversation of the class,” giving them their own room for exploring the English language and academic writing in their own way (Harris, 1995). One study by Podolefsky, Rehn, and Perkins (2013) from Colorado University took place in a 5th grade classroom. The researcher used computer simulations to see how much a teacher-free class proved effective and promising. The results were extremely positive, and the computer program was deemed useful for the students to work on their agency and self-learning. The sense of autonomy in learning that the elementary school students experienced made them more enthusiastic to learn; it also led the classroom to be, in part, more student-centered.

“To tell one’s story is a human right.” The Afghan Women’s Writing Project uses this statement as its motto, a consistent frame for each text. Doing so positions spectatorship by readers and literacy sponsorship by readers and staff as two avenues to help writers recognize the rights that Afghan institutions deny them. However, this ambitious claim reveals an underlying narrative of crisis and rescue. Offering readers’ spectatorship and sponsorship as two models for engagement obscure the writers’ agency and the histories and geopolitics that connect readers in the United States and United Kingdom to women in Afghanistan. Furthermore, positioning spectatorship and sponsorship as forms of advocacy promotes a disingenuously simple message about writing and rights that contradicts the stories many participants compose (*Afghan Women’s Writing Project, n.d.*).

The multi-voiced, nonsequential site content means that AWWP participants also have the power to shape reading practices. In contrast to the project’s editorial apparatus, personal narratives invite readers to engage in a world-traveling model. Readers using this method begin developing an understanding of Afghan women (and non-Western women more broadly) that centers the writers’ subjectivities and self-representations (*Afghan Women’s Writing Project, n.d.*). The emergence of digital storytelling sites indicates that autobiographical writing earns its current popularity by creating connections between far-flung readers and audiences and by linking personal experiences to public conversations. (*Afghan Women’s Writing Project, n.d.*)

In a writing class, the problem originates from the fact, which Bartholomae (1986) highlights in his article, “Inventing the University,” that students usually write to the teacher as the targeted audience. Students usually try their best to conform to a writing discourse community that they do not belong to, or they “have to assume privilege without having any” (p.10).

A study by Psaltou-Joycey (2016) was as done over ten months involving 177 students from Europe and the Middle East who were trying to learn Greek as a second language. The most effective factor in the learning process of the Greek language was cultural background. The students were constantly using references to their own culture and background while using the target language as a means of communication (Psaltou-Joycey, 2016).

This research was based on an Urban Settlement Organization (USO) study, where the program's pedagogy is grounded in meeting students' emotional needs, which helps them participate more enthusiastically in class. Most of the students were Chinese with limited exposure to the English language. The USO class has no specific curriculum and teachers teach the way they find helpful and effective to their students. The goal of this study is to "explore both the teacher and the students' experience in the USO class, where emotions . . . [are] attended to and participation in leadership roles was also heavily reliant on emotions' (Finn, p. 39).

Several such studies have been conducted. Some are relevant to the so-called Interpersonal and Intercultural theories - so the way teachers interpersonally relate to their students and is highly predictive of student emotions and success. Wi and Gu (2019, June) presented a paper at an Inaugural Conference on Language Teaching, etc., at the University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China. This paper was based on qualitative interviews with ten EFL teachers. The authors discovered that most EFL teachers found it challenging to teach students migrating from rural areas to the city, and students of English required huge emotional efforts for teachers at work. So, teachers, as well as the institutional and policy levels should help ESL teachers with EFL students to cope with their emotions and to enhance the English teaching and learning of language students.

Freewriting and Voice

Everyone who walks into a university classroom has some experiential knowledge of linguistic registers, even if they are unfamiliar with the term. The instinct to speak with a different tone, perhaps using different words, based on one's audience, is familiar to anyone who has had to explain or describe the same incident to a friend and separately to an authority figure. Perhaps a more memorable experience we all share would be those times we failed to adequately shift registers and spoke to our friends the way we would normally speak to our mothers or spoke to a judge in a courtroom using language that would be far more appropriate between confidantes. In the first case, this failure to shift could be socially awkward. In the latter case, expressing oneself in the wrong register could be decidedly more disadvantageous. It is important to express yourself in a manner appropriate to your audience and your situation, but what if you have never spoken to a judge before, and never seen the inside of a courtroom before that experience? We become comfortable expressing ourselves in different milieus through practice. Over time, we develop our own voice, and then develop that voice in different registers based on the requirements of those contexts that demand them. As true as this is for developing and using the appropriate register when speaking to a judge, it is as true for developing an appropriate style when writing for an academic audience. Students need to find their own voice, and then their voice in different styles of writing, through practice.

Freewriting has been underscored in composition discussions since at least 1936 (Bean and Elbow, 2019). The importance, though, of freewriting, is not universally acknowledged, and its influence when used by writers is usually not profoundly appreciated and evaluated.

Freewriting is a medium for freedom of ideas and reflection; it ensures a wide range of writing purposes and goals. Freewriting is where the writer's voice and ideology can emerge and prevail limitlessly with no checking on the correction of ideas or language of writing. The feasibility of applying it to any classroom dynamic makes it a priority tool for learning writing in general. This discussion will examine not only the importance of freewriting and its tolerance to voice and ideology but also will provide successful experiences and practices of it.

Freewriting can be tentatively categorized under two types: guided and unguided freewriting. While unguided freewriting is to jot down ideas without any hints at what to write about, guided freewriting provides the writers with the writing prompt and leaves them to handle it the way they desire. The latter is widely used, mostly as a means to improve the writer's writing fluency as they are still bound to a prompt to write about. The former is the one where freedom of ideas prospers and flourishes without the restrictions of a given topic that might limit the writer's thoughts.

Freewriting in this discussion is both a tool and an end. It can be used as a means to help in the process of writing, or simply to write down one's ideas and reflections. On the other hand, the goal can be represented in the freedom writers acquire in the form of the freedom of expression. Special pleasure for both the reader and writer is brought forth from the improvisation that freewriting generates. While the writer enjoys exploring and revealing himself or herself to the reader, the reader enjoys the individuality of the text and perhaps he/she interacts with it as well.

Writers, and specially ESL ones, who are newly brought to academia and exposed to an obligation to write in a way that appeals to the audience, which in great part may be understood to be the instructor, are excessively prone to imitate "academic" voice to sound more professional and to fit in the collegiate rhetoric (Bartholomae). Students presumably know that their voice will never occupy a considerable territory and will not be embraced or cherished in academia. Two totally different languages are brought to two different rhetorical contexts, and the writer's voice is faded out or completely lost between writing to college and writing to personal interests; for example, a student writing for his assignment and knowing that the teacher will grade it, he/she would be intimidated to use any casual utterances in his/her paper, while the same student would use vernacular language to write to his friend. The advent and emergence of ideology is also impeded and not favored in academia as long as voice is hindered from academic papers. Instead of imitating academic voice, students can resort to freewriting. Freewriting tends to have its arms open wide to self-expression and ideology prevalence. It is proven to be a safe area for voice and ideology to develop and arise.

Freewriting is when the author writes "freely" with no instructions or restrictions, to get a pen and a piece of paper and write non-stop until the mind is cleared out of ideas. Freewriting is mentioned in Bean and Elbow's discussion "Freewriting and Free Speech: A pragmatic Perspective" as means to promote "freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression" (Bean and Elbow, 2019). Elbow argues that freewriting can be a "reliable way" (2019) of unorganized writing that helps in the early stages of the writing process. This is apparently absent in many classrooms of first year composition (FYC). Freewriting is usually regarded as a time-filling activity that has no specific significance on the student's awareness of their ideas and beliefs. Its significance as a practice to enhance the writer's writing abilities is usually marginalized. Freewriting is meant to be an essential classroom activity and occupy a prominent area in the curricula of First Year Composition.

Freewriting's importance lies in the fact that this practice leads to a class free of the teacher's authority yet full of students ably geared toward writing their very idiosyncratic ideas reaching to what is mentioned in "Freewriting and Free speech: A Pragmatic Perspective" "Students' Right to their Own Language" (Bean and Elbow, 2019) where students invite their languages to academia comfortably. It can be implemented in many different forms to yield a variety of results. It can be used to enhance the level of writing or what Elbow mentions as "freewriting muscle" (p. 10) at early stages of writing followed by earnest revision, or also as a practice for self-expression and self-exploration at any stage ranging from personal diaries to publications meant for everyone.

Individual "Voice" has been the subject of much debate, regarding to whether or not it is acceptable in writing in general. Many were proponents suggest that inviting voice will achieve a prose that is better and closer to the readers. Those who are against using it are skeptic of its effectiveness in writing or even feared its inclusion having a counter effect. Elbow describes this furious debate in his article "Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries." He stated that writers and rhetoricians should not be extremists. Elbow showcases the downsides and the benefits of each party's view, i.e., when voice is existent in paper and when it is excluded. He illustrates how voice can help or hinder the reading of a text. Voice can add force to the rhetorical stance but its absence can enhance the delivery of the writer's message. Its usage generates enjoyment through reading and allows a relationship to grow between the author and the reader, yet voice can be "too vague" (p. 12) for readers, causing them much confusion. Through these contradictions, Elbow was able to demonstrate that both approaches could work perfectly fine depending on the rhetorical context. His effective and insightful article paves the way to a wise utilization of voice in an adequate manner.

The presence of voice in writing would definitely lead to the emergence of the writer's ideology. If the writer puts his/her own experiences, own emotions, and own background into their writing, his/her ideological traces start to appear in the writer's discourse. Ideology is simply the individual's self, and language is the means through which the individual's ideology can be defined. Thus, freewriting resourcefully overcomes dictations to nurture and promote one's own creeds. Elbow stated in his book *Writing Without Teachers* that "his knowledge about writing

was gathered primarily from personal experience” (486 qtd. In “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class”). If there is no room for freewriting, self-experiences would be much absent from the rhetoric widely circulated.

Ideology can be seen through a more political lens. According to *Oxford Dictionaries* website the word “ideology” has several meanings; two of them include a political sense. One definition is “A system of ideas and ideals, especially one that forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.” The other is, “The ideas and manner of thinking characteristic of a group, social class, or individual.” Ideology is not shaped entirely by an external factor but rather stems from an innate perception and acceptance of those external factors; an individual experience of them. It exists in the collective ideas, beliefs, and experiences of the individual. Freewriting in this situation acts as the catalyst helping this ideology to become visible in writing. In the article “Freewriting and Free speech: A Pragmatic Perspective,” the authors Bean and Elbow explore the political benefits of freewriting. First, freewriting can open up much room for an individual to revisit his/her ideas and beliefs. Second, it helps students to realize the influence of society on their self-identification and beliefs especially if issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion are concerned. It helps also students identify “the complex forces of authority and convention in the classroom and in the culture” (p. 17). Finally, freewriting provides the writer with a considerable space for words to flow without limits and the reader will be pleased to get “a perfect picture of the writer’s mind” (p. 16).

Participant Observations

Composition I students prove to be successful when they had some kind of their “own” space in writing, one example being a guided freewriting assignment about food which was a “real” and self-relating experience that they could enjoy writing about. The difference here lies in the rhetorical context where the students were writing about themselves more than about the assignment: a stance of writing where they can comfortably allow their ideologies, voices, and backgrounds to appear, and sometimes to exert control over their words and style. The food assignment provided a wide range of real life experiences about themselves, the food they like or prefer, the ethnic food and their backgrounds, the food that shaped them and that they could identify with. Their words and sentences were most effective in terms of clarity and correctness. They write a more organized paper than any other assignment they had because in the other assignments they had to follow the instructions forced on them which entails that the topic was apparently distant from their own experiences. This, in turn, leads instructors to one important hint: giving room to freewriting in a writing class and make it as a part of assignment prompts because, apparently, students wanted something to write about while they never sounded pretentious and fake. Peter Elbow describes this stance as “But I want to get as much of that quality [freedom] as I can in my acceptable writing: the energy, the talkiness, the sense of a voice, and the sense of the words or the writer reaching *toward* a reader” (p. 63). This is also the aspiration of any First Year Composition instructor: to get his/her students feel something special about their piece of writing, for them to be attached to it through the ideologies, ideas, and memories they add to the text. We turn it from a task that was intimidating and loathed into one that makes them at ease, accomplishing their writing with their voices standing out prominently.

When looking at the feasibility of bringing students to freewriting sessions, where there is no need of instruction or the guidance of the teacher is less dominating, students can easily start accommodating such a “ritual” in every writing class, and feel the difference in their writing fluency after practicing freewriting for a while. Freewriting should no longer be a time-filling exercise in class, but rather a constructive practice through which students can lean on to reach a higher level of writing fluency. Writers can use freewriting as a means of self-reflection and a medium through which they can assess their ideas and beliefs. Freewriting should come back to writing classes and especially in First Year Composition (FYC) classes. FYC Instructors should expose their students to as much freewriting practice as possible to protect them from developing a style of writing that they think they should use, but that stands at a distance from them, consequently, diminishing the self in terms of voice and ideology. FYC Instructors should also encourage and invite the presence of voice and ideology in academic writing stances to let diversity flourish as it usually does in real life. Broader freedom of expression and a widening of the boundaries upon the use of voice in academia would eventually lead to a healthier writing atmosphere for everyone to write effectually.

A study was done by Heather Finn (2015) that aimed at investigating how incorporating writing topics that touch on personal experience affect the ESL/EFL writers’ self-esteem. The researcher placed two questions under research: the first is “How can the use of encouragement and apprenticeships foster a sense of community within

the adult ESL literacy classroom?” and the second is “In what ways can the emotional needs of adult students shape their participation in learning” (p. 38). The researcher starts her paper by establishing the relationship between emotions and the learning process. The community-based ESL class is not only based on teaching language skills, but also on opening up to others and sharing information with the teachers and classmates; part of learning the language is learning how to use it to effectively and accurately communicate one’s views, after all. At this point, the author mentions the notion of “apprenticeship” or what the researcher explains as “. . . novice members of the class may become experts after a short time” (p. 37). This expertise comes mainly from the huge emotional experience they bring to class.

The main informant in this research, Vivian, experienced many hardships and difficulties all through her life, especially when she arrived at the United States. Her writings were both perfect proof of her hardships, and at the same time, an effective treatment for increasing her self-appreciation and self-confidence. This ambience of encouragement helped Vivian to participate in the class discussions and activities. She also became an assistant to the class teacher, Dr. Fless. Teacher’s Assistants support other students and invite them to participate and practice the skills that should be learned in class. The arc of Vivian’s experience is not anomalous, but illustrates the importance of emotional involvement and support in adult literacy classes.

A case study was conducted in Thai EFL classrooms that instituted guided freewriting for eight weeks. Students showed consensus that guided freewriting enhanced their writing fluency either in freewriting contexts or academic writing (Hwang, 2010). Guided freewriting should be seriously considered in the pedagogic process because students, especially FYC students, fear any writing assignment that is undefined and unguided. Guided freewriting is a middle ground where students can still find their voice without the intimidation of grammatical and thematic strictures in of the academic register; it is handy and practical especially for those first applications of freewriting in class. In his article, “Freewriting: An Obvious and easy Way to Speak onto The Page,” Elbow quotes a very important piece of advice from Ken Macrorie that can be easily implemented in composition classrooms to get the students to reflect on and/or rethink their ideas and lives on a piece of paper and improve their writing fluency. Macrorie prescribed, “a ten-minute exercise of nonstop writing where you [the student] just put down words that come to you, not trying for good or correct writing” (9). When freewriting is an important part of FYC curriculum, students will experience writing in a novice sense that will definitely lead them to enjoy writing and believe in their abilities as academic writers.

Observations at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO)

Two programs were observed at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO): The Intensive Language program (ILUNO) and the ESL classes offered by the English Department of the UNO. ILUNO is for international students who are learning English as a second language. Most students during the period of observation are Asian, Middle Eastern, and South American. According to the UNO website, the ILUNO program offers intensive English courses that last for eight weeks, with 21 hours in class per week. Instructors in this program teach a wide range of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills offered through different classes with different levels. The ILUNO mission, again, per the website, is “to provide a comprehensive, student-centered English as a second language program where students learn to communicate successfully in personal, professional, and academic environments”. The program also provides students with an opportunity to become eligible for further academic studies. The ethnographic composition of the ILUNO classes is diverse with Asian students who are mainly Chinese and Japanese; Middle-Eastern students such as Saudi, Omani, Emirati, Syrian, and Iraqi. Some students are South American mainly from Brazil.

On the other hand, other ESL classes focus on mainly academic writing. Students are either international or English is their second language. The two levels offered are ESL I and ESL II classes. These classes involve teaching other basic skills such as reading, speaking, and listening but they are mostly integrated in the curriculum of argumentative and other types of essays. These classes are kinds of preparation for the more advanced writing courses, Composition I and Composition II, offered for all students seeking various majors. The ethnographic composition of ESL classes is mainly refugees and immigrant populations for whom English is a second language. The classes observed consist of students who are Karen, Karenni, Nepali, Russian, and Arabs from different Middle-Eastern countries.

Ten English classes meant for ESL students were observed, five of which were the same class, ESL II-English 1100. The class period was 75 minutes twice a week. The other classes were meant for beginners through the ILUNO program: Reading, Writing, Grammar (RWG)1600 &1700 for 180 minutes, and Creative Writing for 95 minutes. Other aspects were considered on class-by-class basis. In addition to observations, the handouts from the instructors were collected, whether they were articles, assignment prompts, or instructional papers.

Conclusion

The challenge in a multicultural classroom is the way that instructors can accommodate and embrace all that the students bring to the classroom when the latter's source of knowledge is mostly reliant on the teachers themselves. Unfortunately, this is the case in many of ESL/EFL writing classes, and many classes in general, where the teacher keeps control of the class without having the students sharing more actively in the learning process. In addition to that fact, students having less agency and contributing less to the class dynamics are proven to diminish their learning competency. Students who have fewer opportunities for the writing activities or topics of their own choice may become disinterested and grow passive in class. For instance, students learning styles vary: some students are visual learners while others are aural learners. Furthermore, when the teacher imposes a topic on the students to write about, some students may not be motivated to write about a topic outside of their area of interest. In the case of ESL/EFL student, sometimes they are unfamiliar with the topic itself; one example can be discrimination and racism as expressed within the context of American history, a topic which not every student has necessarily experienced in his/her country, or even had enough background information to write on. Unfortunately, so many times, their writing proves unsuccessful and less convincing because they are writing out of others' experience and knowledge, and they have nothing from their own beliefs or experiences to add.

They need to write a paper that satisfies the instructor, and they may struggle to discuss or write about topics that the instructor has chosen. Students, especially ESL/EFL students, find the writing task daunting and exhausting beyond the normal requirements of learning English. This presumably stems from ESL/EFL students' need to have a sense of familiarity of the topics discussed and assigned in the class as writing projects. Thus, providing an entrée into the academic writing process in the form of assignments based on their interests would help students to develop their own relationship with the language, and their own voice, without the added layer of difficulty of thinking and writing about something outside of their experience.

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