

I

Investigating Students' Experiences Across the Curriculum: Through the Eyes of Classroom Researchers

The chapters in Part I are written by ESOL and composition researchers who have investigated multilingual students' experiences in undergraduate courses across the curriculum. These authors examine various ways individual students struggled but eventually achieved success in the process of acquiring multiple academic literacies. Together, these studies reveal that the acquisition of language and literacy is a long-term, evolving process. They demonstrate that language is situated in particular contexts and acquired while exploring and engaging with the subject matter within these contexts. They also show that students' achievements in college courses depend on the complex interplay between students' abilities and backgrounds and the expectations and tasks of specific courses. These investigations make clear that ESOL and composition courses cannot prepare students for all the discipline-specific demands they will face. Faculty across college courses inevitably play a crucial role in students' ongoing acquisition as learners, readers, writers, and language users.

Strangers in Academia: The Experiences of Faculty and ESOL Students Across the Curriculum

Vivian Zamel

Noting that many faculty focus on multilingual students' linguistic errors rather than on their academic potential, conflating language use with intellectual ability, Vivian Zamel emphasizes that the process of language acquisition is slow-paced and that it continues to evolve with exposure, immersion, and engagement. Thus the promotion of language acquisition needs to be a shared responsibility across the curriculum. Vivian encourages ESOL and all other faculty to collaborate in order to discover ways to enhance the learning of all students.

When I go into a classroom these days, I look around and feel like I'm in a different country.

—*Professor of Management*

A few weeks ago a professor came by the reading, writing and study skills center where I tutor. He was with a young Asian woman, obviously one of his students. He "deposited" her in the center, claiming that she desperately needed help with her English. The woman stared into the distance with a frightened, nervous look on her face and tried to force a smile. She handed me a paper she had written on the labor union and asked if I could help her make corrections. After a short introductory discussion, we looked at the paper that we were about to revise—it was filled with red marks indicating spelling, punctuation and grammar errors; the only written response was

something along the lines of "You need serious help with your English. Please see a tutor."

—A Tutor

Students in the lab speak to one another in their own language so that they make sure they know what they are doing. So they may look like they are not listening to the lab teacher. He feels so isolated from them. He feels he has no control, no power. So he may get angry.

—An ESOL Student

These comments show evidence of tensions and conflicts that are becoming prevalent in institutions of higher education as student populations become more diverse. In 1977, Mina Shaughnessy referred to the students who entered the City University of New York system through open admissions as "strangers in academia" to give us a sense of the cultural and linguistic alienation they were experiencing. In listening to the comments of faculty (note, e.g., the comment of the professor of management), it occurs to me that they too are feeling like "strangers in academia," that they no longer understand the world in which they work. Neuleib (1992) similarly points out that although it is common to view students as "other," as alienated from the academic community, our differing cultural perspectives result in our own confusion and alienation.

One clear indication that faculty across the disciplines are concerned about the extent to which diverse student populations, particularly students whose native language is not English, constrain their work is the number of workshops and seminars that have been organized, and at which I have participated, in order to address what these faculty view as the "ESL Problem."¹ In the course of preparing to work with faculty, and in order to get a sense of their issues and concerns, I surveyed faculty across the curriculum about their experiences working with non-native speakers of English. Some faculty saw this invitation to provide feedback as an opportunity to discuss the strengths and resources these students brought with them. They indicated that ESOL students, because of their experience and motivation, were a positive presence, and noted the contributions these students made in discussions that invited cross-cultural perspectives. One professor took issue with the very idea of making generalizations about ESOL students. But this pattern of response did not represent the attitudes and perspectives revealed by other faculty responses. One professor, for example, referred to both silent students, on the one hand, and "vocal but incomprehensible students" on the other. But, by far, the greatest concern had to do with students' writing and language, which faculty saw as deficient and inadequate for undertaking the work in their courses. I got the clear sense from these responses that language use was confounded with intellectual ability, that, as Villanueva (1993), re-

counting his schooling experiences, put it, "bad language" and "insufficient cognitive development" were being conflated (p. 11).

In order to demonstrate the range of faculty commentary, I've selected two faculty responses, not because they are necessarily representative, but because they reveal such divergent views on language, language development, and the role that faculty see themselves as playing in this development. I've also chosen these responses because they may serve as mirrors for our own perspectives and belief systems and thus help us examine more critically what we ourselves think and do, both within our own classrooms and with respect to the larger institutional contexts in which we teach. In other words, although these responses came from two different disciplines, it is critical for each of us to examine the extent to which we catch glimpses of our own practices and assumptions in these texts. The first response was written by an English Department instructor:

One of my graduate school professors once told me that he knew within the first two weeks of the semester what his students' final grades would be. Recently I had a Burmese-born Chinese student who proved my professor wrong. After the first two essays, there was certainly no reason to be optimistic about this student's performance. The essays were very short, filled with second language errors, thesaurus words, and sweeping generalizations. In the first essay, it was obvious he had been taught to make outlines because that's all the paper was, really—a list. In the second essay, instead of dealing directly with the assigned text, the student directed most of his energy to form and structure. He had an introduction even though he had nothing to introduce. In his conclusion, he was making wild assertions (even though he had nothing to base them on) because he knew conclusions were supposed to make a point. By the fourth essay, he started to catch on to the fact that my comments were directed toward the content of his essays, not the form. Once he stopped worrying about thesis sentences, vocabulary, and the like, he became a different writer. His papers were long, thoughtful, and engaging. He was able to interpret and respond to texts and to make connections that I term "double face" as a way to comment on the ways in which different cultures define such terms as "respect." Instead of 1 1/4 pages, this essay was seven pages, and it made several references to the text while synthesizing it with his experience as someone who is a product of three cultures. This change not only affected the content of his writing, but also his mechanics. Though there were still errors, there were far fewer of them, and he was writing well enough where I felt it was safe to raise questions about structure and correctness.

This response begins with the recognition that we need to be wary of self-fulfilling prophecies about the potential of students, and indeed this instructor's narrative demonstrates compellingly the dangers of such prophecies. This instructor goes on to cite problems with the student's performance, but he speculates that these problems may have to do with previous instruction, thus reflecting a stance that counteracts the tendency to blame students. Despite the student's ongoing difficulties, the

instructor does not despair over the presence of second language errors, over the short essays, the "sweeping generalizations," the empty introduction, the "wild assertions." Instead, this instructor seems to persist in his attempts to focus the student on content issues, to respond to the student seriously, to push him to consider the connections between what he was saying and the assigned reading, to take greater risks, which he succeeds in doing "by the fourth essay." In this, I believe, we see the instructor's understanding that it takes multiple opportunities for students to trust that he is inviting them into serious engagement with the course material, that it takes time to acquire new approaches to written work. What seems to be revealed in this response is the instructor's belief in the student's potential, his appreciation for how language and learning are promoted, his refusal to draw conclusions about intellectual ability on the basis of surface features of language—all of which, in turn, helped the student become a "different writer," a change that affected the content of his writing, that had an impact on the very errors that filled his first papers, that even illuminated the instructor's reading of the assigned texts. This response suggests a rich and complicated notion of language, one that recognizes that language evolves and is acquired in the context of saying something meaningful, that language and meaning are reciprocal and give rise to one another.

The other faculty response, written by an art history instructor, reveals a very different set of assumptions and expectations:

My experience with teaching ESL students is that they have often not received adequate English instruction to complete the required essay texts and papers in my classes. I have been particularly dismayed when I find that they have already completed 2 ESL courses and have no knowledge of the parts of speech or the terminology that is used in correcting English grammar on papers. I am certainly not in a position to teach English in my classes. (The problem has been particularly acute with Chinese/S.E. Asian students.) These students may have adequate intelligence to do well in the courses, but their language skills result in low grades. (I cannot give a good grade to a student who can only generate one or two broken sentences during a ten-minute slide comparison.)

The first assumption I see in this response is the belief that language and knowledge are separate entities, that language must be in place and fixed in order to do the work in the course. This static notion of language is further revealed by the instructor's assumption that language use is determined by a knowledge of parts of speech or grammatical terminology. Given this belief, it is understandable why she is dismayed by what she characterizes as students' lack of knowledge of grammar, a conclusion she has seemingly reached because her corrective feedback, presumably making use of grammatical terms, has not proven successful. This

practice itself is not questioned, however; instead, students and/or their inadequate English language instruction are held accountable. If students had been prepared appropriately, if the gatekeeping efforts had kept students out of her course until they were more like their native language counterparts, her commentary suggests, students would be able to do the required work. There is little sense of how the unfamiliar terms, concepts, and ways of seeing that are particular to this course can be acquired. Nor is there an appreciation for how this very unfamiliarity with the course content may be constraining students' linguistic processes. She does not see, focusing as she does on difference, how she can contribute to students' language and written development, how she can build on what they know. Despite indicating that students may have "adequate intelligence to do well in the course," she doesn't seem to be able to get past their language problems when it comes to evaluating their work, thus missing the irony of grading on the basis of that which she acknowledges she is not "in a position to teach." The final parenthetical statement reveals further expectations about student work, raising questions about the extent to which her very expectations, rather than linguistic difficulties alone, contribute to the "broken sentences" to which she refers.

What we see at work here is in marked contrast to the model of possibility revealed in the first response. What seems to inform this second response is a deficit model of language and learning whereby students' deficiencies are foregrounded. This response is shaped by an essentialist view of language in which language is understood to be a decontextualized skill that can be taught in isolation from the production of meaning and that must be in place in order to undertake intellectual work. What we see here is an illustration of "the myth of transience," a belief that permeates institutions of higher education and perpetuates the notion that these students' problems are temporary and can be remediated—so long as some isolated set of courses or program of instruction, but not the real courses in the academy, takes on the responsibility of doing so (Rose, 1985). Such a belief supports the illusion that permanent solutions are possible, which releases faculty from the ongoing struggle and questioning that the teaching-learning process inevitably involves.

In these two faculty responses, we see the ways in which different sets of expectations and attitudes get played out. In the one classroom, we get some sense of what can happen when opportunities for learning are created, when students are invited into a thoughtful process of engaging texts, when students' writing is read and responded to in meaningful and supportive ways. In the other classroom, although we have little information about the conditions for learning, we are told that one way that learning is measured is by technically correct writing done during a 10-minute

slide presentation, and this, I believe, is telling. For students who are not adequately prepared to do this work, there is little, the instructor tells us, she can do. Given this deterministic stance, students are closed off from participating in intellectual work.

At the same time that I was soliciting faculty responses to get a sense of their perceptions and assumptions, I began to survey ESOL students about what they wanted faculty to know about their experiences and needs in classrooms across the curriculum. I felt that the work I was engaging in with faculty could not take place without an exploration of students' views, especially because, although faculty have little reservation discussing what they want and expect from students, the students' perspective is one that faculty hear little about.

Over a number of years, I collected more than 325 responses from first- and second-year ESOL students enrolled in courses across a range of disciplines.² I discovered from looking at these responses a number of predominant and recurring themes. Students spoke of patience, tolerance, and encouragement as key factors that affected their learning:

Teachers need to be more sensitive to ESL students needs of education. Since ESL students are face with the demands of culture adjustment, especially in the classroom, teaches must be patients and give flexible consideration.... For example—if a teacher get a paper that isn't clear or didn't follow the assignment correctly, teacher must talk and communicate with the students.

Students articulated the kinds of assistance they needed, pointing, for example, to clearer and more explicitly detailed assignments and more accessible classroom talk:

In the classes, most teachers go over material without explaining any words that seems hard to understand for us.... I want college teachers should describe more clearly on questions in the exams, so we can understand clearly. Also, I think the teachers should write any important information or announcement on the board rather than just speaking in front of class, because sometimes we understand in different way when we hear it than when we read it.

Students spoke with pride about how much they knew and how much they had accomplished, working, they felt, more than their native English-speaking counterparts, and they wanted faculty to credit and acknowledge them for this:

I would like them to know that we are very responsible and we know why we come to college: to learn. We are learning English as well as the major of our choice. It is very hard sometimes and we don't need professors who claimed that they don't understand us. The effort is double. We are very intelligent people. We deserve better consideration.... ESL students are very competent

and deserve to be in college. We made the step to college. Please make the other step to meet us.

At the same time, an overwhelming number of students wanted faculty to know that they were well aware they were having language difficulties and appreciated responses that would help them. But they also expressed their wish that their work not be discounted and viewed as limited. They seemed to have a very strong sense that because of difficulties that were reflected in their attempts at classroom participation and in their written work, their struggles with learning were misperceived and underestimated:

The academic skills of students who are not native speakers of English are not worse than academic skills of American students, in some areas it can be much better. Just because we have problems with language ... that some professors hate because they don't want to spend a minute to listen a student, doesn't mean that we don't understand at all.

Students referred to professors who showed concern and seemed to appreciate students' contributions. But the majority of students' responses described classrooms that silenced them, that made them feel fearful and inadequate, that limited possibilities for engagement, involvement, inclusion.

Although these students acknowledge that they continue to experience difficulties, they also voice their concern that these struggles not be viewed as deficiencies, that their efforts be understood as serious attempts to grapple with these difficulties. Though faculty may feel overwhelmed by and even resentful of working with such students, these students indicate that they expect and need their instructors to assist them in this undertaking, even making suggestions as to how this can be done. Indeed, the very kind of clarity, accessible language, careful explanation, and effort that faculty want students to demonstrate are the kinds of assistance students are asking of faculty. Without dismissing the concerns of the art instructor, these students nevertheless believe, as does the English instructor, that teaching ought to be responsive to their concerns.

Yet another source of information about students' classroom experiences came from my longitudinal case study of two students who attended my first-year composition course and who met with me regularly every semester until they graduated. At these meetings, they discussed the work they were assigned, their teachers' responses to and evaluation of their work, the classroom dynamics of their courses, the roles they and their teachers played, and the kinds of learning that were expected in their classes. These students also wrote accounts about their course experiences, documenting and reflecting on these experiences from their own perspectives and in their own voices.³

One of the students who participated in this longitudinal investigation was Motoko, a student from Japan who took a range of courses and majored in sociology. She described the occasional course in which lively interaction was generated, in which students were expected to participate, to write reaction papers and to undertake projects based on firsthand research, to challenge textbook material and to connect this material to their own lived experiences. But in most of her courses the picture was quite different. Lectures were pervasive, classes were so large that attendance wasn't even taken, and short-answer tests were often the predominant means of evaluating student work. With respect to one class, for example, Motoko discussed the problematic nature of multiple-choice exams, which, she believed, distorted the information being tested and deliberately misled students. In regard to another course, she described what she viewed as boring, even confusing lectures, but she persevered: "Because I don't like the professor, I work even harder. I don't want him to laugh at me. I don't want to be dehumanized. I came here to learn something, to gain something." In yet another course in which only the professor talked, she indicated that she was "drowning in his words." Even a class that Motoko completed successfully disappointed her because she had such difficulty understanding the assignments and because her writing was not respected to in what she perceived as a thoughtful, "respectful" way. Motoko confided that despite her success in this course, she had lost interest in working on her papers.

The other student whose classroom experiences I followed was Martha, a student from Colombia who, like Motoko, took a range of courses, and whose major was biology. Unlike Motoko, who had managed to negotiate "drowning words" and problematic assignments, Martha's sense of discouragement about the purposelessness of much of her work was far more pervasive. With respect to many of her courses, she complained about the absence of writing, which she viewed as essential for learning course content as well as for her own growth as an English-language learner. Commenting on one course in which little writing was required, she said, "I have no new words in my lexicon.... I was moving forward and now I'm stagnant." She referred to the passive nature of class discussions, contrived assignments that "don't help me think about anything," and the lifeless comments she received. It was in her science courses, however, that she felt the greatest dissatisfaction and frustration. About one chemistry course, she spoke of "just trying to follow the lectures and get a grade in a huge class" that she characterized as a "disaster." She talked of the sense of superiority her professors projected, of her inability to learn anything meaningful from assignments that required everyone "to come up with the same information." Her growing sense of despair provoked her to write a piece in which she questioned the purpose of schooling, assignments, and written work: "Each teacher should ask her or himself the next

question: Why do I assign a writing paper on this class? Do you want to see creativity and reflection of students or do you want a reproduction of the same book concept?" She was frustrated by the "lack of connections with the material we listen on lectures," the "limited style of questions," and what she saw as the "barriers" to learning.

What Martha shared with me demonstrated her commitment to learning. It further revealed her insightful understanding of how learning is both promoted and undermined, how writing in particular plays an essential role in this learning, and how critical it is for teachers to contribute to and encourage learning. She, like Motoko and the other students surveyed, has much to tell us about the barriers that prevent learning and how these barriers can be broken. And lest we conclude that what these students perceived about their experiences is specific to ESOL learners, studies of teaching and learning in higher education indicate that this is not the case. For example, Chiseri-Strater's (1991) ethnography of university classrooms reveals the authoritarian and limited ways that subject matter is often approached, the ways in which students, even those who are successful, are left silent and empty by the contrived and inconsequential work of many classrooms.

This ongoing exploration of the expectations, perceptions, and experiences of both faculty and students has clarified much for me about the academic life of ESOL students and what we ought to be doing both within our classrooms and beyond. Given the hierarchical arrangement of coursework within postsecondary schools, given the primacy accorded to traditional discipline-specific courses, it is not surprising that ESOL and other writing-based courses have a marginalized position, that these courses are thought to have no authentic content, that the work that goes on in these courses is not considered to be the "real" work of the academy.

This view typically gets played out through coursework that is determined by what students are assumed to need in courses across the curriculum, coursework whose function it is to "guard the tower," to use Shaughnessy's term, and keep the gates closed in the case of students who are not deemed ready to enter (Shaughnessy, 1976). This often implies instruction that focuses on grammar, decontextualized language skills, and surface features of language. And we know from what faculty continue to say about these issues that this is precisely what is expected of English and ESOL instruction—and, unfortunately, many of us have been all too ready to comply. Rose (1985) speaks to the profoundly exclusionary nature of such a pedagogy and argues that a focus on mechanical skills and grammatical features reduces the complexity of language to simple and discrete problems, keeps teachers from exploring students' knowledge and potential, and contributes to the "second-class intellectual status" to which the teaching of writing has been assigned (p. 348). Furthermore, the problematic assumption that writing or ESOL programs are in place to serve the academy, that their function is to bene-

fit other academic studies, prevents us from questioning our situation within the larger institution. "Service course ideology," Fox (1990) points out, "often leaves the curricular decisions in the hands of those who are not especially knowledgeable about writing instruction," which ultimately means that "political questions—in fact, any questions that challenge existing definitions of basic writing—become irrelevant to the bureaucratic task of reproducing the program" (p. 67).

Whereas skills-based models of instruction bring these kinds of pressures to bear on our work with students, our teaching has further been constrained by composition specialists who make claims about the need for students to adopt the language and discourse conventions of the academy if they are to succeed. Bartholomae's (1986) article, "Inventing the University," is often cited and called upon to argue that students need to approximate and adopt the "specialized discourse of the university" (p. 17). In the ESOL literature, a reductive version of this position has been embraced by professionals who maintain that the role that ESOL coursework ought to play is one of preparing students for the expectations and demands of discipline-specific communities across the curriculum. Such an approach, however, misrepresents and oversimplifies academic discourse and reduces it to some stable and autonomous phenomenon that does not reflect reality. Such an approach implies that the language of the academy is a monolithic discourse that can be packaged and transmitted to students *before* they enter the classroom contexts in which this language is used.

Those of us who have tried to accommodate institutional demands have, no doubt, found this to be a troubling and tension-filled undertaking, because even when we focus on standards of language use or conventions of academic discourse, students, especially those who are still acquiring English, are not necessarily more successful in meeting the expectations of other faculty. There seems to be little carryover from such instructional efforts to subsequent work because it is the very nature of such narrowly conceptualized instruction that undercuts genuine learning. Those of us who have resisted and questioned such a pedagogy, embracing a richer and more complicated understanding of how language, discourse, and context are intertwined, may be able to trace the strides students make and to appreciate the intelligence their language and writing reveal, and yet find that this is not extended by other faculty who cannot imagine taking on this kind of responsibility.

We need to recognize that in the same way that faculty establish what Martha calls "barriers" between themselves and students, ESOL faculty, too, are perceived as "outsiders." And as long as these boundaries continue to delineate and separate what we and other faculty do, as long as we are expected to fix students' problems, then misunderstandings, unfulfilled expectations, frustration, and even resentment will continue to mark our experiences. But this need not be the case. We are beginning to

see changes in institutions in response to the growing recognition that faculty across the disciplines must take responsibility for working with all students. Studies, such as the ethnography undertaken by Walvoord and McCarthy (1990), have documented the transformation of faculty from a range of disciplines who became more responsive to the needs of their students as they undertook their own classroom research and examined their own assumptions and expectations.

In my own work with faculty at a number of different institutions, including my own, what first began with a concern about "underprepared" or "deficient" ESOL students has led to a consideration of the same kinds of pedagogical issues that are at the heart of writing-across-the-curriculum initiatives. But these issues are reconsidered with specific reference to working with ESOL students. Together, we have explored our instructional goals, the purposes for assigned work, the means for reading and evaluating this work, the roles that engagement, context, and classroom dynamics play in promoting learning. Through this collaboration faculty have begun to understand that it is unrealistic and ultimately counterproductive to expect writing and ESOL programs to be responsible for providing students with the language, discourse, and multiple ways of seeing required across courses. They are recognizing that the process of acquisition is slow-paced and continues to evolve with exposure, immersion, and involvement, that learning is responsive to situations in which students are invited to participate in the construction of meaning and knowledge. They have come to realize that every discipline, indeed every classroom, may represent a distinct culture and thus needs to make it possible for those new to the context to practice and approximate its "ways with words." Along with acknowledging the implications of an essentialist view of language and of the myth of transience, we have considered the myth of coverage, the belief that covering course content necessarily means that it has been learned. Hull and Rose (1990) critique "the desire of efficiency and coverage," noting how this focus limits rather than promotes students' "participation in intellectual work" (p. 296). With this in mind, we have raised questions about what we do in order to cover material, why we do what we do, what we expect from students, and how coverage is evaluated. And if the "cover-the-material" model doesn't seem to be working in the ways we expected, we ask, what alternatives are there?

We have also examined the ways in which deficit thinking blinds us to the logic, intelligence, and richness of students' processes and knowledge. In *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose (1989) cites numerous cases of learners (including himself) whose success was undercut because of the tendency to emphasize difference. Studies undertaken by Glynda Hull and her colleagues further attest to how such belief systems about students can lead to inaccurate judgments about learners' abilities, and how practices based on such beliefs perpetuate and "virtually assure failure" (Hull, Rose, Fraser, & Castellano, 1991, p. 325).

Thus, we try to read students' texts to see what is there rather than what isn't, resisting generalizations about literacy and intelligence that are made on the basis of judgments about standards of correctness and form, and suspending our judgments about the alternative rhetorical approaches our students adopt.

In addition to working with faculty to shape the curriculum so that it is responsive to students' needs and to generate instructional approaches that build on students' competence, we address other institutional practices that affect our students. At the University of Massachusetts at Boston, for example, the Writing Proficiency Exam, which all students must pass by the time they are juniors, continues to evolve as faculty across the curriculum work together, implementing and modifying it over time to create a tool that immerses students in rich, intellectual, and thematically integrated material to read, think about, and respond to. As part of this work, we have tried to ensure that faculty understand how to look below the surface of students' texts for evidence of proficiency, promoting a kind of reading that benefits not just ESOL students, but all students. The portfolio option, which requires students to submit papers written in courses as well as to write an essay in response to a set of readings, has proven a good alternative for ESOL students to demonstrate writing proficiency. The portfolio allows students to demonstrate what they are capable of achieving when writing is imbedded within and an outgrowth of their courses.

Throughout this work, one of the most critical notions that I try to bring home is the idea that what faculty ought to be doing to enhance the learning of ESOL students is not a concession, a capitulation, a giving up of standards, for the approaches that faculty continue to put into effect may not and may never have been beneficial for any students. What ESOL students need—multiple opportunities to use language and write-to-learn, course work that draws on and values what students already know, classroom exchanges and assignments that promote the acquisition of unfamiliar language, concepts, and approaches to inquiry, evaluation that allows students to demonstrate genuine understanding—is good pedagogy for everyone. Learning how to better address the needs of ESOL students, because it involves becoming more reflective about teaching, because it involves carefully thinking through the expectations, values, and assumptions underlying the work we assign, helps faculty teach everyone better. In other words, rather than seeing the implications of inclusion and diversity in opposition to excellence and academic standards (as they often are at meetings convened to discuss these issues), learning to teach ESOL students challenges us to reconceptualize teaching and thus contributes to and enhances learning for all students.

Needless to say, given the complexity of this enterprise, these efforts have not transformed classrooms on an institution-wide basis. As is obvious from the surveys and case studies I have undertaken, change is slow,

much like the process of learning itself. As we grapple with the kinds of issues and concerns raised by the clash of cultures in academia, we continue to make adjustments that, in turn, generate new questions about our practices. This ongoing dialogue is both necessary and beneficial. Like other prominent debates in higher education on reforming the canon and the implications of diversity, this attempt to explore and interrogate what we do is slowly reconfiguring the landscape and blurring the borders within what was once a fairly well-defined and stable academic community. According to Gerald Graff (1992), this is all to the good because this kind of transformation can revitalize higher education and its isolated departments and fragmentary curricula. Within composition, the conflicts and struggles that inevitably mark the teaching of writing are viewed as instructive because they allow students and teachers to "reposition" themselves, because they raise questions about conventional thinking about instruction and challenge us to imagine alternative pedagogies (Horner, 1994; Lu, 1992). Pratt's (1991) notion of a "contact zone," which designates a site of contestation, is embraced because it enables us to redraw disciplinary boundaries, to reexamine composition instruction, and to revise our assumptions about language and difference.

When faculty see this kind of redefinition as a crisis, I invite them to reconsider their work in light of the way the word *crisis* is translated into Chinese. In Chinese, the word is symbolized by two ideographs, one meaning danger, the other meaning opportunity. Because the challenges that students bring with them may make us feel confused, uncertain, like strangers in our own community even, as if our work and professional identities are being threatened, there will be dissonance, jarring questions, ongoing dilemmas, unfulfilled expectations. We can see this reflected in the second faculty response, a response that insists that there are students who don't belong, that the doors be kept closed. But, as we saw in the first response, perplexities and tensions can be generative, can create possibilities for new insights, alternative interpretations, and an appreciation for the ways in which these enrich our understanding. Seen from the fresh perspective that another language can provide, the Chinese translation of *crisis* captures the very nature of learning, a process involving both risk and opportunity, the very process that ideally students ought to engage in, but that we ourselves may resist when it comes to looking at our own practices. But as Giroux (1991) urges, teachers must "cross over borders that are culturally strange and alien to them" so that they can "analyze their own values and voices as viewed from different ideological and cultural spaces" (pp. 254–255). When we take risks of this sort—when we take this step into the unknown, by looking for evidence of students' intelligence, by rereading their attempts as coherent efforts, by valuing, not just evaluating, their work, and by reflecting on the critical relationship between our work and theirs—opportunities are created not only for students but for teachers to learn in new ways.

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NOTES

¹The acronym ESL (English as a Second Language) is the commonly used term to refer to students whose native language is not English. At urban institutions, such as the University of Massachusetts at Boston, most of these students are residents of the United States. Furthermore, in the case of a number of these students, English may be a third or fourth language. Given this complexity, the editors of this volume have adopted the acronym ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) to refer to students with multilingual backgrounds.

²This investigation of student responses was first initiated by Ruth Spack, whose findings were published in *English as a Second Language* (Spack, 1994). My ongoing survey built on her work.

³A number of these accounts appear in Part II of this volume.

The Acquisition of Academic Literacy in a Second Language: A Longitudinal Case Study, Updated

Ruth Spack

Ruth Spack reports on her longitudinal case study of a student from Japan who experienced so much frustration in her first-year social science courses that she considered transferring to a university in Japan. Ruth focuses on how Yuko developed strategies to succeed as a reader and writer in several disciplines, including her chosen field, and reveals how Yuko's understanding of language and literacy acquisition changed over time as she reflected on her own learning process. In the Appendix, Yuko reflects back on the study 3 years after her graduation.

This study began informally at the beginning of a fall semester at a private 4-year liberal arts university. I had a 9 a.m. meeting with a first-year student from Japan who had requested a space in the ESOL composition program, which I directed. Yuko (a pseudonym) had not been invited to enroll in the program primarily because she had achieved a high TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score—640—which indicated that she could do work at the same level as U.S.-born speakers of English. Yet nothing I said in the meeting could convince her that this was true; she gave no explanation other than “I can’t.” Partly because she was having difficulty expressing herself, I decided to allow her to enroll in ESOL composition. As she chose the time block in which I was teaching, I realized I had a unique opportunity to look beyond her TOEFL score to gain a fuller understanding of her acquisition of academic literacy before she en-