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# Mixed Classes, Mixed Pedagogies: A Study Of Intercultural Collaborative Learning In A College Developmental Writing Course

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MIXED CLASSES, MIXED PEDAGOGIES: A STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL  
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN A COLLEGE DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING  
COURSE

by

D. MICHAEL KELEHER

Under the Direction of Dr. Elizabeth T. Burmester

ABSTRACT

College writing classes are often populated by students with varied native and non-native language backgrounds. This phenomenon should impact the ways that teachers develop the curriculum for such courses in order to best enhance their students' learning. This dissertation explores the impact of culturally themed course content and group and dyadic writing activities on linguistically diverse developmental

writing students. The research questions were 1) How do paired and group writing activities impact student perceptions of the usefulness of collaborative learning? and 2) How does enrollment in a culturally-themed writing class emphasizing paired and group learning affect intercultural attitudes? Just as this project builds on and responds to previous scholarship on writing groups, so too did the pedagogical choices the instructor in developing reading and writing assignments for the students. As the literature suggests, blended language origin writing classes are becoming the norm, and instructors must provide students the requisite literacy and intercultural skills for success in an increasingly globalized society. This dissertation provides the background, methodology, findings and implications of an action research study of intercultural collaborative learning in the developmental writing classroom.

**INDEX WORDS:** Basic writing, Collaborative learning, Teacher research, Action research, Developmental writing, Composition, Intercultural

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COURSE

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D. MICHAEL KELEHER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2013

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D. Michael Keleher  
2013

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May 2013

## **DEDICATION**

For my parents, my first teachers

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I am especially fortunate to have the support of my wife and daughters who, with patience and compassion, allowed me the time necessary to complete my coursework and dissertation. I am so lucky to have such a loving trio with whom to share the challenges and rewards of academic life. Finally, I must acknowledge my parents, who have never shown reservations about my life choices and have stood by me while I forged an admittedly unique yet gratifying path as a student and teacher. This dissertation and my career are testimony to their belief that a quality education is essential for professional success and personal fulfillment, a message I never hesitate to share with my students and daughters.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

School has often been characterized as engulfed in “dailiness.” Participants, teachers and administrator are seldom encouraged to stand back and think seriously about what they do or what they might be doing. Instead educators are caught up in rhythms and systems that defy systematic reflection and analysis of that reflection. (Wideen & Andrews, 1987, p. 34)

I was led to think about the distance between what we do as teachers and what we say we believe in (Tompkins, 1990, p. 663).

I have been teaching writing for nearly twenty years, initially in small group tutorials then, for the past fifteen years, as a classroom instructor. My current role involves teaching developmental reading and writing courses as well as supervising a cadre of part-time faculty who do the same. In the process of completing my Master’s work in the mid-90s then, more recently, my doctoral studies, I have read much of the literature about basic writing and have talked about the subject with classmates, professors and colleagues at work and at conferences. In doing so, I have met professionals at every stage of their careers, from energetic and idealistic newcomers to pragmatic and sometimes jaded long marchers. Of course, most of the basic writing teachers I have been privileged to know and work with have fallen somewhere between these two extremes, but almost all of the ones who have been at it for years, like me, appear to share certain qualities: a passion for classroom teaching, a quiet though

sometimes forthright advocacy for their students, and skepticism about any silver-bullet theory or pedagogy that assures student success. This dissertation evolves out of my own continuing effort to harmonize these aspects of professional life (advocacy, passion and skepticism) in an ongoing search for ways to better know my students' needs, my institutional obligations, and a pedagogy that synthesizes those goals with the insights I have been able to glean from nearly two decades of work in the field.

After I chronicle, in Chapter 1, my early experiences as a student and practitioner of basic writing, I will summarize the literature about basic and ESL writing that applies to the pedagogical choices I made for the classes in which I conducted this action research study. As Huang (2010) notes, "Action researchers are, relative to conventional social scientists, more autobiographical in their expression" (95). As such, we realize the necessity to contextualize our research, since it doesn't seek the neutrality of more scientific methods of knowledge formation. Therefore, it is essential for me to frame the study presented in the later chapters by first setting the stage through a mix of biography and scholarly discussion which foregrounds the rationale for this study and the methodological choices I made.

It is for the reader to determine whether I have been successful in keeping sentimentality at a minimum while constructing a necessarily personal description of my study of a collaborative and intercultural model for teaching composition and its implications for me, my students and colleagues in the field. I believe that such an approach builds, in part, on the academic narratives of authors such as Mike Rose (1980) and Jane Tompkins (1990; 1996), whose autobiographical forays exploring the junctures between personal and professional work in the academy testify to the

humanistic values espoused by proponents of teacher research (Irmscher, 1987; Newkirk, 1992; Ray, 1993). I can only hope that the professional growth and change promised by action research will show through the ensuing story of my journey into the field of composition studies and the research narrative which follows, as I believe this work has been and remains to be impactful in significant ways for my students and my own continued development as a writing teacher.

### **Basic Writing: Narratives of Growth and Change**

Perhaps the most well-known, though certainly not earliest, basic writing story is Mina Shaughnessy's, as described in the first issues of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (1975), at length in her seminal book *Errors and Expectations* (1979), and later in biographies and inquiries into her contributions during a defining epoch in open admissions history that took place at the City University of New York. For it was during the turbulent decade when Americans fought to end the Vietnam war and secure equal rights for women that universities began to open their doors to students previously denied access. Anyone who teaches basic writing, and has read about CUNY in the 1970s, probably still sees, almost daily, intersections between their work and that of Shaughnessy and her colleagues, whether in the diversity of the backgrounds and needs of their students, the challenge of developing an effective pedagogy, or the lack of status afforded those who teach underprepared students.

The fact that the discussion of basic writing has gone through many turns, debates, even the occasional call for its banishment from colleges, speaks to its ongoing significance as a story that continues to be told in new and thought-provoking



ways. This following presentation of my own personal history as a basic writing practitioner seeks to capture some of the narrative vitality that often characterizes basic writing lore by tracing my path from graduate student and writing tutor to my current teaching, which becomes the focus of this dissertation, an action research study of my own writing pedagogy and its impact on my students.

Once I describe the choices and events that led to my immersion into the field of college writing, the discussion will move on to the research done in the contexts relevant to my study: composition theory and practice, the teaching of English as a second language, and collaborative learning in “mixed” college writing classes populated by native and non-native speakers. In the literature review and ensuing chapters which summarize the methodology, results, and implications of my research, some core themes emerge: how teacher dissatisfaction can lead to growth and change through an improved understanding of the needs of students and of the ways to help them achieve their literacy objectives; how institutional and systemic boundaries often frame the manner in which teaching and learning occurs in the classroom; and how reflection is an essential aspect of professional development and reinvigoration.

John Dewey (1922) was among the first to argue that teachers must counter the inevitable “routinization” that comes from policy or tradition-driven curricular demands by becoming more reflective in their work. However, setting aside time for reflection can be a daunting task, considering the amount of time teachers must spend in the classroom, in meetings, and, of course, preparing for class and grading student work; all of this can be compounded if one is teaching writing, where the grading load often amounts to nights and weekends away from family and removed from the tranquility

required for productive reflection. Supervising part-time college writing faculty who teach high school during the day, I have witnessed first-hand the unlikelihood of teachers taking it upon themselves to make curricular modifications, preferring a ready-made teaching plan provided by a curriculum specialist, if, for no other reason, than to ensure fidelity to an approved model and, thus, continued teaching success and employment. After all, teachers know, perhaps better than anyone else, the time and effort necessary to develop effective teaching strategies since their training and early professional development was likely marked by trial and error and the attendant thrill of discovery that often marks entry into the field of education. As the years progress, this kind of exploration inevitably gives way to pragmatism that can be anything but reflective with each semester bringing enough variables (changing student populations and teaching assignments) that even the most innovative teacher grasps for something more routine or stable, a prescribed curriculum allowing little room for reflection or modification. So I am never surprised when my offer of relative pedagogical autonomy to a new adjunct faculty is rebuffed, with the teachers preferring to follow my own syllabus and assignments with little to no modification.

I know this phenomenon all too well, which is why, when given the chance during my graduate studies and dissertation preparation, I decided to step back from what was becoming a rote, almost scripted, teaching career, to be more reflective about what led me to that point, and how I might proceed with greater confidence and enthusiasm. I believe that reflection should not just dwell on current teaching contexts and innovations but a teacher's past experience, as it bears on his or her desire for pedagogical change. Of course, writing about one's teaching runs the risk of being overly subjective, even

sentimental, offering a solipsistic “teacher as hero” narrative (Holberg & Taylor, 1999, p. 1). This dissertation, however, is about the benefits of, and necessity for, taking risks. As such, the following chronicle of my early professional experiences reveals nothing heroic, just how pragmatism and chance, more than training or philosophy influenced what happened in my classes, until I decided to use action research as a means of becoming a more reflective and confident teacher, as well as to benefit my students through collaborative and intercultural learning.

### **A Student Enters the Field**

Though I would like to believe so, like many basic writing teachers I have met over the years, I did not initially enter the field out of a desire to make a difference or level an unfair playing field. My start was propelled more by a fragile ego and the desire start paying back, rather than taking out, student loans for the master’s work I had started immediately following completion of my undergraduate degree in English. Having not been offered a research or teaching assistantship at the only school which accepted me for admission, if I wanted to pursue my ambition to become a college professor, I had to borrow thousands of dollars to pay the out-of-state tuition and other expenses my meager savings from summer jobs would not cover. After one semester of adding nearly \$10,000 in student loan debt to the thousands I had incurred already borrowing for my bachelor’s work, I decided to look for a full-time job, and thus become a part-time graduate student.

Increasingly envious of my peers, who were already getting classroom experience as teaching assistants, I combed the local papers for teaching or tutoring

positions, rather than the typical restaurant or service post oft sought by graduate students. The first ad that caught my eye was for the position of Supplemental English Instructor at what was listed as a “small, liberal arts college” a few towns away. Well, if I wasn’t deemed TA material, maybe someone would take me on in whatever a “supplemental” role might be. At least I might have the opportunity to teach college English in some fashion and start retiring some of the accumulated debt that couldn’t be diminished as effectively by waiting tables or washing dishes.

After being offered an interview at the college, I approached two doctoral students with local ties to find out more about the school and how I might craft a lesson for the required teaching demonstration. Their responses were surprising, but useful. Roger, in his best southern drawl, said, “You do know that school is 99.9 percent black?” This surprised me on two levels. Save Howard University and Bethune-Cookman, I didn’t know there were many black colleges, let alone ones characterizing themselves as small, liberal arts colleges, a label that suggested to me the elite schools dotting the mid-Atlantic and northeast, attended by, primarily, white students outfitted in J. Crew and L.L. Bean. In fact, I had started my college education at such a school. Nevertheless, Roger’s comment caught me particularly off-guard because I had become friends with him partly because he seemed to share my progressive views on such matters, so I couldn’t tell if his statement reflected his own unease, or what he anticipated to be mine. Either way, it left me wondering, but still hopeful of getting the position. Julia, the other classmate I consulted, side-stepped inquiries about the school, but suggested I teach subject-verb agreement, which, until I looked it up in a handbook

she provided me, I wasn't really sure I had ever been taught. Clearly, this interview would take me somewhere unfamiliar, if not wholly exotic.

When I arrived on campus in early December, I was interviewed by the retired school teacher who supervised the Supplemental Instruction program. Curiously, she had little to offer about the job, stating that the program was brand new, and she had just been hired weeks earlier. After our brief discussion, I was led to the Dean's office for an even shorter interview which I frankly recall little of, save the fact that my hands were sweating so much that I lost grip of the shiny *Little Brown Handbook* I was carrying on my way out of her office--the section on subject-verb agreement was dog-eared in preparation for my lesson, which I was beginning to wonder if I would even teach.

The next item on the hurried itinerary was a tour of a computer lab—apparently a show-place for prospective teachers, though it only revealed to me, the datedness of its materials and equipment, including a “Hooked on Phonics” box of flash cards that must have been purchased decades earlier. This was certainly an austere place, a small school which I was told had an enrollment of fewer than one thousand students, so small in fact that the President would be interviewing me as well, an occasion for which I wasn't prepared since, in my experience, college Presidents were only seen at convocations and graduations, not for interviews with junior faculty, if I could even be considered as such.

In an office nearly as large as the computer lab, the President explained his vision for the institution's future, noting its recent investment, at the behest of the regional accreditation committee, in technology and improved academic support services, including the position for which I was applying. After briefing me on The

College's short (less than a century) history, his own distinguished academic and professional accomplishments, including his role in taking the college out of significant debt and into full accreditation decades earlier, he acknowledged that he too had been an English major and hoped I would continue my studies regardless of the outcome of my day at the college. Sitting across the desk from him, I was too nervous to volunteer much in the way of conversation, which, fortunately, he didn't seem interested in pursuing.

As it turned out, the President's office was the last stop, so I never did that teaching demonstration, but I was offered the job shortly after Christmas, and just a week later, on my first day at work, learned that Supplemental Instructor actually meant tutor. Maybe that was why they didn't need to see me teach, since I wouldn't quite be doing it anyway. Nevertheless, regardless of any misgivings I may have had about The College's limited resources, or the modest status I would hold, I was elated to be working in the field and no longer incurring debt. And the title of Supplemental Instructor seemed appropriate considering my inexperience as a teacher.

Being so small, The College didn't have the finances to locate or staff a writing center. In fact, my early one-on-one tutorials were given in a partitioned classroom housing the entire academic support unit: a counselor, the Supplemental Math Instructor, administrative assistant, Program Director, and myself. From my cubicle, I overheard tearful counseling sessions, the administrative assistant's occasional, hushed arguments with her boyfriend, and I'm sure they all listened to my early, frustrated attempts to help students with their grammar and writing skills. And I was still very much a student, joining my friends over beer at week's end, and sometimes mid-week,

regaling them with stories from a place far from their (and my) personal and academic comfort zones.

Yes, I was a beginner, as were the students I tutored, who were new to college and academic writing. But I wasn't just new to teaching; I was becoming immersed in a culture to which I had limited exposure. Coming from the predominantly white suburbs of central Florida, I had few occasions to interact with people from the African American community. Even in a fairly diverse public high school, the only black student I knew well was in honors classes with me and ultimately went to West Point, about as far from open admissions as you can get. Although some of the students at The College were academically gifted, most (more than half of incoming freshmen) were placed in developmental math, reading, and/or English. My role was to help students learn, in the words of my supervisor, "The Queen's English." Since this seemed easier and safer than attempting to infuse any of the literature or theory to which I was being introduced in my graduate courses, I assented and started hosting evening group sessions on topics such as sentence errors, punctuation, word choice, and, of course, subject-verb agreement.

Those evening tutorials were essentially my first classes, usually attended by a half dozen or so freshmen, and a few upperclassmen, who were preparing for the writing component of a teaching certification exam. I used one-page handouts for those sessions, formulaic in their set-up with a brief explanation of a grammar rule followed by examples of sentences observing and deviating from the rule, with space for students to make their own attempts based on the models. That my approach would have been considered dated, perhaps even ineffective to seasoned compositionists, did not cross

my mind, as I was just happy to be working in the field and had the support of my students' instructors who appreciated offloading discussions of grammar and usage to my tutorials, so they could focus more on what they liked to teach: rhetorical strategy and introductory literature studies. Thus, it was in those evening mini-lectures and discussions that I first gained my long yearned for teaching experience, in the only lit classroom (The College offered no night classes in those days), standing behind a lectern, nervously explaining rules of form and usage that I hadn't considered since middle school, modest and formulaic for sure, but probably not unlike the start of many teaching careers.

After my first semester at The College, I decided to change the focus of my graduate study from American Literature to composition and rhetoric so I could learn how to better serve my students as a mentor for their literacy skills. While I soon learned a great deal of basic writing lore and theory, since I still wasn't teaching official classes, I had few opportunities to apply that knowledge. More than anything, the coursework provided me a needed sense of belonging, with the belief that writing instruction at any level and in any place (writing center, student conference or classroom) had been, and was continuing to be, explored and valued as a profession. It was in those classes that I was introduced to the work of basic writing luminaries including Mina Shaughnessy, David Bartholomae, Mike Rose, and Nancy Sommers, who all wrote about their work and the unique and enriching experience of assisting basic writers. I may not have had a classroom in which to implement the pedagogies they espoused, but, through reading and discussing their work, I felt I had joined, at least in spirit, a community of dedicated scholar/teachers working and writing from the front lines of democratic literacy



education. And even though conversation around basic writing in the 80's and 90's was fraught with tension and debate, it was articulated with a passion that only bolstered my desire to soon enter the classroom as a full-time instructor and employ some of what I was reading about.

As a result of my graduate study and ongoing work at The College, I chose to write my master's thesis on how basic writing was being taught locally, and how those practices intersected the discussion in the literature. In doing so, I learned that state and institutional policy, not teachers, often played a bigger part in determining a school's writing curriculum. At a nearby community college, where students had to pass two basic writing courses and a standardized essay exam to proceed to college writing, the courses moved sequentially from sentence to paragraph to essay construction. This reflected the current-traditional paradigm (Berlin, 1980; 1982) often critiqued for its formalism, yet still thriving in programs culminating with high-stakes testing as a means to ensure state-wide uniformity.

At the comprehensive university where I studied, basic writers were, as well through state policy, mainstreamed into college writing though invited (not required) to receive extra support in a special "Writing Studio" available only to those students. In these sessions, unlike the grammar drills I observed in the community college tutorials, the students met in groups and discussed assignments and shared drafts, essentially work-shopping their essays with peers and a graduate student facilitator. They certainly didn't get any of the grammar quizzes the community college tutors assigned; rather, they mostly read each other's work and talked about possible additions in content or how considering alternative perspectives might develop a stronger thesis or essay. Not

only did the studio program enhance the learning opportunities of the mainstreamed students, but it provided, for graduate students, valuable mentoring experience with a population with which they might otherwise be wholly unfamiliar. Clearly, depending on context, current basic writing practice varied greatly, even within the same community.

While doing the research for my thesis, I befriended a colleague who started allowing me to teach his classes at The College with him attending, at first, then later, having me cover for him whenever he was out sick or attending a conference. Though infrequent, these sessions were essential in building my confidence as a teacher. And since these were mostly Introduction to Literature classes, they gave me confirmation that teaching literature was not the best fit for me, and that my chosen specialization of composition better aligned with my desire to help students develop skills that would be useful to them regardless of their majors.

### **Making Choices**

As I look back now, I realize that what I was doing in those individual and small group sessions at The College was aligned with basic writing theory and practice as described in some of the literature. I was essentially following the current-traditional paradigm, which emphasized the structure and style proffered in most composition handbooks going back to the nineteenth century. In tutoring my students about developing topic sentences and supporting details in each paragraph, while making sure to work from a clearly defined thesis in the introductory paragraph, I was holding up for my students a standard of writing that many theorists I was studying decried as out-dated, even limiting the students' opportunities for learning the critical thinking and

writing skills required in contemporary academia. In fact, I had even written against the current-traditional model in my graduate work and master's thesis. But, like that of the faculty and staff at the schools I studied for my thesis, my work was being governed by the rules laid out by an administration convinced that underprepared college students were not capable of rhetorical nuance and might even be penalized for experimenting with styles not readily familiar to faculty who themselves associate essay writing with current-traditional modes of style and development.

The ensuing years of my professional work would come to be defined by this contradiction of sorts: my desire to be contemporary, even experimental in my teaching but the administrative pressure to be safe and conventional. Even when I had the opportunity to teach general education writing classes and was free of standardized exit requirements, I was often cautious not to teach or assign anything out of the ordinary, sticking to the prescribed curriculum (by the Composition Program) and rarely veering away from the prescribed forms of exposition and research arguments. Thus, in those early years of my professional training and practice, I would more often choose the more conservative route, uncertain as I was about my ability, and aware—through my review of the literature during my graduate studies--of the provisional status often granted (basic) writing teachers. To me, taking chances might not just lead to failure, but the circumspection of those who hired me, who could easily locate, if necessary, a replacement.

Upon completing my thesis and graduating, I was finally offered a full-fledged instructorship at The College, which, though gratifying, immediately posed a dilemma. Do I take the position and relegate myself to the uncertainty of being a non-tenured

instructor, or do I continue my graduate study full-time and work on my doctorate with the possibility, though years in the future, of greater job security? Having commuted to The College for several years at that point, while taking classes and studying in what free time remained, I knew I couldn't manage both school and work at such a pace any longer. And I had gotten married the previous summer, a factor which may have contributed most to my choice to delay further doctoral studies and start teaching. I'd waited long enough, and, nearing thirty, wanted the tangible evidence of my hard work that a salary and full-time teaching position offered. Just as seeing my friends in graduate school getting that early teaching experience as TA's led me to seek out that first job at The College, seeing them now graduating-- many having completed their doctorates even, and moving into full-time work--influenced my decision-making as well. With few friends remaining nearby, I was free, in a way, to forge a path all my own, and so I took the promotion and was immediately immersed in the life of a full-time composition instructor, teaching more classes and grading more papers than I felt I could manage, learning once again that pragmatism, sadly, often trumps creativity when one is a novice teacher.

I wish I could say that my preparation at the university and The College set me on a course for distinguished, innovative teaching, but I hardly remember the student evaluations or even their being mentioned during my annual reviews in those first years as a college writing teacher. I was already something of a fixture at The College, a known quantity, and my department chair and students liked me. It didn't hurt that other, older faculty were greeted with comparatively less enthusiasm from the administration or students. For many of them, burnout had set in and they were, in some cases, just

going through the motions. Occasionally, an eager young faculty member would be hired, but he or she would leave a year or two later, sometimes confiding their surprise, before departing, that I hadn't yet done the same.

Because our developmental studies program didn't require students to jump any final hurdles to exit the courses, I was free to choose the books and curriculum as long as the students composed at least five essays during the semester. Even though I intended to emphasize the writing process over written products-- as much of the research I had studied suggested-- I felt more confident with the current-traditional approach used by my colleagues and made familiar to me in my work tutoring their students. Again, it was a safe choice, and I didn't want to seem brash or rebellious now that I had gotten what I had wanted for so long. Thus, I taught my basic writers the modes: description, illustration, comparison and contrast, and argument. And though it wasn't stipulated, their essays tended to be four to five paragraphs, "fifty star themes" as Janet Emig (1971) had characterized them decades earlier, for their ubiquity in American education. Indeed, my teaching soon became as formulaic as my students' essays, with each unit starting with a prose model, followed by the students parroting its basic structure with a topic of their own, the culminating essay being an extension of the lock-step topic with supporting detail paragraph outlines they assembled beforehand. Like other choices I would make, this first stab at college teaching was more derivative of context and circumstances than my own principles or training.

My cultural adjustment to life at the College was slower and more complex than learning how to provide for my students' language needs, as it involved functioning productively within a hierarchical administrative structure famously, though to my mind,

unfairly, attacked in Ann Jones' *Uncle Tom's Campus* (1974), which was recommended to me by some of the long-term faculty and staff who were jaded about, or even resentful of, what increasingly appeared to me just a necessary, if at times authoritarian, effort to counter the (mis)perception in the local and broader community that schools like ours were inferior in management and programming compared to majority (read predominantly white) colleges and universities. This fact and its implications could warrant a chapter all its own, but for the immediate purposes of my research, the most salient point is that I learned to fit in through cultivating a sense of respect and acceptance for an initially alien culture that had warmly welcomed me and ultimately taught me a great deal about teaching, learning, tolerance and social justice—all components of my teaching and, consequently, the study described in the following chapters.

The evidence of my assimilation into life at The College included being invited to emcee a spelling bee in a nearby rural feeder school district, assisting with several evening fine arts, cultural, and educational programs that The College offered for the community, playing in faculty-student sporting events (basketball was disastrous but comedic), keeping a regular tennis match with a colleague and graduate of a nearby HBCU, and, sadly, being a pall bearer at the funeral of my Dean, a former English professor and mentor, whose untimely passing at age 51 provided my first glimpse of the transitory nature of our working lives. It was through these personal and public experiences that I was able to feel well-rounded in my work, even though the luster of teaching was beginning to fade. After a few years of teaching developmental reading and writing, as well as college and advanced (upper level) composition, I was starting to

feel too settled, falling into a routine that left little time for reflection or curriculum reconsideration. And despite the satisfaction I got from seeing my students' growth and my own cultural aptitude expand, I found myself in a rut by the time I finished just my third year of full-time teaching at The College. Fortunately, an opportunity arose that would provide me some needed respite and renewal when my department chair offered to send me to a developmental studies institute out of state, for a summer month of residential training and study with the only provision that, upon return, I would put into action some aspect of what I learned at the four-week institute.

Whereas my graduate study explorations into basic writing exposed me to the ongoing pedagogical and theoretical discussion as represented in the field's specialized journals and book-length collections, my research and training at the summer institute provided me a broader view of the history of remediation and the ways in which it has been quantitatively researched by practitioners and administrators who are more often tasked with proving its efficacy statistically, rather than anecdotally or theoretically. I suspect that most instructors who have been trained exclusively in English departments, as opposed to schools of education, would feel in such an environment, as I did, like the proverbial "fish out of water." However, I resisted the impulse to strike a circumspect or defensive posture to the aspects of developmental education with which I had not previously been familiar, out of a sense of obligation to The College, the faculty at the institute, and my own desire for professional development. After all, I had only been doing this work full-time for just over two years and, frankly, it was a welcome change of pace to be the student again, attending daily workshops on teaching, tutoring, administering, and assessing developmental education, while planning my own year-

long capstone project to be implemented upon my return to The College, which turned out to be a study of the impact of collaborative learning in classes where instructors had previously employed only individualized modes of student learning. Clearly, in retrospect, being sent to the institute would pay long-term dividends, even leading, over a decade later, to the research summarized here, in the following chapters.

Upon return to The College, I presented a summary of my work at the institute to the faculty during the fall semester opening meetings, then implemented my collaborative learning study by working with two colleagues on reformulating their curriculum to allow for collaborative, group-learning activities in one of their classes, an upper level Economics course and a general education World Literature class. This was the first time that I employed some of the research methods used for this dissertation: observation, surveying, and interviews. And although my efforts were clearly rudimentary and largely unremarkable, they did provide me the first practical evidence of the value of cooperative learning, which remains an aspect of work in all courses I teach.

Aside from becoming The College's expert in residence on collaborative learning, holding trainings throughout the year following my return from the institute, I was also tasked with administering a new developmental studies program, and found myself consumed as much with placement testing and program assessment as I did with planning and teaching my classes. This fact is all the more striking, in retrospect, because teaching had been something I desired so much for so long. Supervision of colleagues was definitely something I didn't envision years before when I joined the faculty, and it certainly didn't enhance my standing with those who had been teaching



the courses for decades, and who didn't relish having their work scrutinized by a junior colleague.

I soon became so busy with report writing, program planning, and serving on committees, that teaching became something of a refuge, though not in the way I wished for in the years I worked as a tutor. It was just a distraction from the mundane administrative work that took up the majority of my time. How could it become mundane, almost routine, so quickly? Even when I walked to the stage to accept the Professor of the Year award that spring, I had to force an appreciative smile and suppress my wonderment and even a bit of shame that someone so inexperienced yet work-worn, could receive such acknowledgment. And, a year later, as I watched a colleague get the same award, I sat there wondering if he was preparing his own departure in the coming year, for I had accepted another position just a week before, and would be packing up my office later that afternoon.

Anyone who has read Pat Conroy's *The Water is Wide* (1972) might recognize a few similarities between his experiences on the fictional Yamacraw Island, and my own at The College: the joys and frustrations of a new teacher, the challenge of connecting with students and staff from different backgrounds, and the mutual affection and respect possible once suspicion and stereotypes are cast aside. And, like the young Conroy of that autobiographical novel, I too made what some foresaw as an inevitable departure, equally rooted in an ambition for something more, but driven as well by the sad reality of life in the still largely segregated south. For although my time at The College brought me into a new and vibrant culture, my interactions in town and my own neighborhood were often marked by slights and digs about working at "that college." For no matter

how hard I championed the merit of what the faculty and staff were doing in conversations at neighborhood dinner parties, I would always get that knowing glance or chuckle indicating that whatever I was doing was more charitable than professional.

I would like to believe, if I had been more mature and confident in myself, these slights would not have mattered so much, but it did. And as I started to wonder about my children growing up in such a place, and the troubling effects teasing and prejudice could have on them, I made the difficult choice to take a risk by entering the job market, rationalizing that focusing my search on a metropolitan area would grant me and them the opportunity to remain open to other cultures, but in a more diverse setting. Therefore, I applied for positions only in large cities in the South, being invited to interview at a regional university, and, later, a community college. Driving home from my two-day interview at State U., I felt confident that would be where I would land, and before I even had the opportunity to interview at the community college, I was offered a position that appeared to offer me the chance to synthesize my teaching and administrative skills, while finally giving me the autonomy to grow beyond the cautious teaching model I had previously followed.

### **A New Context**

When I came to State U. to replace the outgoing Learning Support English Coordinator, all I knew about the program was that the students typically ranged in age from 18 to middle-age, with the majority of day students being the former, and night students, the latter. During the interview, there was little discussion of international students, since they would also be, generally, evening students, and, therefore, taught

by part-time faculty assigned those classes. However, one thing quickly became clear: The African American student population was small, and I don't just mean compared to The College's. State U. enrolled thousands of students from over 100 countries, but African Americans made up less than 8% of this diverse group.

As the Learning Support English Coordinator, my duties included curriculum redevelopment, since I would be the first basic writing specialist in this role. I was also charged with hiring and supervising new part-time faculty, bringing more technology into the classroom, and providing ongoing assessment for the program. My Department Chair, who was initially hired a decade previously in the same role as mine, had been the last to establish the program's curriculum, favoring a current-traditional approach that certainly suited the exit requirements for the course, a timed writing, and, for some, a standardized test of edited English. So it was refreshing to have a vote of confidence from my supervisor, particularly because it meant a deviation from her own, successful (in terms of pass rates) pedagogy, which was a basis for her dissertation, a defense of current-traditionalism and its roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century rhetorical history and practice.

Looking back, I marvel at her confidence in my ability to keep producing capable writers who could exit the course at the expected rate (roughly 90%) while initiating curricular reform. This was certainly uncommon leadership, as it posed considerable risks to the unit's reputation should these changes fail in achieving the same efficacy demonstrated in previous years. Nevertheless, with the freedom to choose new textbooks and assignments for the students—with input from the other faculty teaching the course—I considered a range of options: incorporating more technology, such as discussion boards or PowerPoint presentations; introducing a novel in the

developmental reading course; and doing away with grammar modules and five-paragraph essays that had previously distinguished the developmental writing pedagogy. All of these, at the time, seemed feasible, since it was, after all, pretty much up to me to decide. Even the full-time faculty supported these changes without any apparent reservations. Perhaps they had seen the limitations of the current-traditional approach in their years teaching basic writing at State U. or maybe, like me, they relished the shift from an emphasis on sentences and paragraphs to one that focused more on full essays and argumentation, which the students would be expected to have mastered, to some degree, upon entry to English 1101.

Even though I felt free at State U. to start exploring alternatives, a sort of hurried pragmatism would again characterize my pedagogical decisions, beginning in that whirlwind first week on campus when, amidst day-long orientation sessions and various meetings with department and program colleagues, I had scant time to design syllabi, let alone anything suggesting the innovation or theoretical influence I hoped to display. Other semesters, the conflicting desires to continue to do what worked in the previous term, and yet somehow revise or expand the curriculum, would cause a sort of paralysis until shortly before the first day of class, when I'd throw together a rough set of assignments and the course calendar, which would inevitably change three or four times at least by semester's end.

This is not to say that I failed to implement changes. We did replace the current-traditional styled text with handbooks and readers more akin to what students got in the "regular" first year credit-level writing course. I encouraged the developmental studies faculty I supervised to deemphasize the five paragraph essay except in preparation for

the timed exit writing sample, and gave them much desired autonomy in how they approached teaching the course. However, the specter of a blindly graded (by English 1101 faculty) Exit Essay Exam kept my own wanderings in check, and though I didn't assign or expect multi-paragraph genre essays in most cases, I did institute what I hoped to be a stop-gap insurance policy against Exit Exam failure, by heavily weighting two in-class essays, one at mid-term and one in the final week, that were administrated identically to the way the Exit Essay exam would be. Since students needed a 70 course average to qualify for the Exit Essay, making the in-class essays 50% of their grade would almost guarantee success for those who earned the requisite "C" average for the course. Indeed, it worked, as a few students in each class were disqualified from taking the Exit Exam because of their in-class essay grades, which helped keep my Exit Exam pass rates where they had always been. And by deferring any in-depth coverage of grammar until it was review time for the few non-traditional students required to take a final standardized English test to exit the course, I was able to prepare those small groups for success through brief discussions of agreement, semicolons, and apostrophes, in the week following the Exit Essay.

Soon the Learning Support English program was, essentially, on autopilot, with respectable completion numbers and the faculty and students generally satisfied, as I received few questions or complaints about the course and all faculty continued to get flattering evaluations from the students. However, this success was from a single vantage-point: that of an administrator. My training and research had taught me that each of those superficially positive outcomes could easily be problematized, with the consistent exit figures possibly being more reflective of student motivation and potential

upon course entry rather than the teaching or program quality. Also, faculty contentment might have just been an outgrowth of my hands-off approach, or the fact that rehiring is often tied as much to personality as dedication; and positive student evaluations alone can't verify effective teaching and learning. But no one was bothering to look more closely at what was happening. Who had the time or inclination? It turned out--through a combination mid-career ennui, a sudden shift in State U.'s student population, and my timely enrollment in an action research course—that I would soon be in a position to initiate needed change, not just for my sake but to benefit my students in making the transitions necessary for improved literate and personal classroom interactions. Of course, having taught writing for nearly a decade at that point and having done a considerable amount of research and professional development, both as a student and practitioner, I had developed a teaching philosophy and set of methods that appeared effective based on student feedback and our program's achievement of prescribed learning outcomes. So before describing the events leading to this dissertation study, I will now provide a summary of my teaching philosophy and classroom practices in order to provide additional context for a study that has synthesized aspects of my ongoing professional development with the immediate needs—as I have perceived them—of the students who participated in this research project.

### **Becoming a Reflective Teacher**

Despite any misgivings I have had about the efficacy of my teaching, by the time of my third-year review at State U., I had developed a teaching philosophy informed by what might be termed “non-foundational” (Bruffee, 1998) approaches to teaching and

learning, particularly the notion that knowledge is socially-constructed, influenced by familial, cultural and linguistic forces--the latter well illustrated by cases where writing students struggle with dialectical interference informed more by the speech-ways of their family and peers than by any innate inability to grasp the language structures taught in school. My teaching and scholarship has thus been largely devoted to the intersections between constructivist theories of learning and language, and their application in the reading and writing classroom. Therefore, I create learning situations for students that go beyond the more foundational aspects of teaching (lecture/discussion/test), to alternative methods which involve affect and motivation, collaborative learning, and the use of online technologies, such as weblogs.

Just as the unique contexts from which my students emerge (family, friendships, work, school and community) inform their knowledge and learning processes, so too does the environment I provide for their development. Thus, I view the classroom as a community of learners, really co-learners, including myself. We all support one another in a group effort, in a reading/writing workshop, to develop as readers, thinkers and writers. In their evaluations, students often focus on how the classroom functions as an inviting and supportive context for mutual growth. Therefore, I also try to be accessible to my students in class and outside of class through email or on the online course discussion board. It is in the classroom, however, where I feel it is most likely for students to achieve the type of interdependent learning that I am seeking in the research presented here.

In terms of how the students in my class engage with the process of developing their college writing skills, I have them transition from personal, inner-directed writing to

academic discourse, the transactional writing expected of them in upper level courses. I find this transition works best when I have students, early in the term, compose their own personal narratives and descriptive essays (drawn from journals they keep) as a way to get them writing with greater confidence, as I once heard celebrated novelist Gloria Naylor advise, by “dropping their buckets nearby.” Students indicate that journaling serves this purpose well, particularly when they synthesize the essays read for class with their own experiences. Around mid-term, the students are ready for more outer-directed work, engaging with topics requiring them to explore issues from a less personal, more global perspective. This course design aims to yield not just a change in point of view, but a change in attitude toward writing as well.

My courses are generally process-centered, as students learn the processes behind successful reading and writing and are, thus, offered class time to work on the stages of academic reading (pre-questioning, skimming, note-taking...) and writing (prewriting, writing, and revising). This approach helps students focus on reading and writing as processes, rather than as merely assignments and due dates. Another aspect of my teaching, which this dissertation study emphasizes, is group formation and collaboration, a required element in all of my classes.

The value of collaborative learning cannot be overstated, as research in this area (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) suggests such activities improve student motivation, increase the frequency of out-of-class group academic interactions, and, of course, offers the team-working skills necessary for future success. This is especially relevant in developmental reading and writing classes where there is significant heterogeneity, bringing together students from the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Asia. Therefore, I



have tried to design activities uniting students from different backgrounds together in productive ways. In fact, this study is derivative of my forays into collaborative learning, though with the focus less on academic than interpersonal and intercultural growth.

I have always been interested in the ways that collaboration can help decentralize classroom authority away from the instructor, and thus provide students with team-working skills and social learning opportunities. For example, the teaching of grammar—once carried out through lecture and drills—is now, in my classes, a collaborative effort where students work together to construct and administer a lesson for the class. As such, a foundational concept, direct grammar instruction, is couched in a nonfoundational application, a collaborative learning activity, which relocates teaching authority to the students, who not only teach the lesson, but give and grade a test in order to measure the success of their efforts.

Students also collaborate via weblogs in my writing classes: preparing for quizzes by going to the “blog” and discussing the reading assignment or post essay ideas or drafts and get commentary from their peers. In some ways, weblog use can be seen as nonfoundational in that it goes beyond the traditional sense of academic time and space. The communication is asynchronous since students can post or comment any time of day; and, being automatically archived, a weblog can provide longitudinal data about course and student growth. Where student evaluations and syllabi are artifacts expressed in solitary moments, the weblog transcends those fixed spaces and materials, offering instructors a long-range tool for assessing a course’s evolution.

Though the focus here is the developmental writing course (English 0099), my commitment to personal growth and social transformation extends to my teaching of

general education writing courses (ENGL 1101 and 1102) where I not only seek to help students build their college writing skills but also provide them perspectives for considering the dynamic and changing world around them. Since English classes are reading-driven in that students often write in response to readings, the content for these classes is usually thematic, addressing topical issues such as ethics, the environment, cultural diversity, shifting gender roles, and media violence, to name just a few. This concern for environmental and social justice stems from my early years as a graduate student working at The College, and it informs the direction of the action research project described here.

Although I continue to receive positive feedback from students at all levels, I sometimes doubt whether I am truly benefiting my students in any substantial way. The evaluations are generally complementary, I've won teaching awards and some of my students have even published their work locally. I couldn't be all that bad. Yet the nagging feeling of mediocrity is there. Sure they appear to improve as thinkers and writers, at least most of them, over the course of the semester, and my developmental studies classes hit the program benchmarks with roughly 80-90% of the students passing the courses in their first attempts, but who's to say they wouldn't do the same in anyone else's class? In fact, I had data that showed they did complete the courses with similar efficacy, whether they were taught by full-time faculty, or part-timers with little to no previous college teaching experience. And although I was the first basic writing specialist to manage the program, my predecessors had overseen the same passing rates, and they were using the oft-maligned current-traditional method.

When feeling particularly morose, I even wonder if the Learning Support students could make it through without any teacher at all, just a set of PowerPoint slides, some handouts, the course texts, and time to view and read those materials, and compose and revise a few essays. All of this sometimes makes me feel more like a placeholder than a well-trained and effective or innovative writing teacher. Grading papers, going to conferences, writing grants and articles, and, especially, teaching can feel as mechanical and predictable as most jobs do over time. And, after teaching at State U. while supervising the Learning Support English program for a few years, I needed a lift of some kind, some proof that I was making a positive impact on my students' literacy. I needed some way to tap back into the energy I had in the early days when I'd stride into class more ambitious than prepared, but excited about the possibilities. So, two years into my work at State U., I decided to go back to school for my Ph.D. in hopes that the research framework that graduate study would provide might offset, if not fully ameliorate, the premature burn-out that was diminishing my enthusiasm for teaching.

Without going into too much detail, the graduate coursework in Rhetoric and Composition definitely benefited my teaching, though mostly in the Freshman Composition and Research Writing courses (ENGL 1101, 1102) I taught, since the historical rhetoric and composition theory I was studying was more easily adaptable to those contexts. Yes, I was reacquainting myself with the ongoing scholarly discussion of basic writing theory and practice, as the ensuing literature review will detail. However, my ongoing dissatisfaction with professional work was not remedied by my studies, only submerged under the weight of the dual commitments of being a teacher and student, leaving me little time for reflection. I was, nonetheless, appreciative of the opportunity to

increase my knowledge while applying it in the classroom, and after two years in the doctoral program, a situation emerged that would finally provide the chance to begin addressing the malaise that had sent me back to school.

### **An Opportunity Presents Itself**

In the fall of 2008, State U. increased its admissions requirements, which led to a reduction in the number of students requiring college-prep writing and reading instruction. To illustrate, in fall 2002, when I first arrived at the university, we offered 12 sections of ENGL 0099; by fall 2009 we only needed four. With so few offerings, full-time faculty I had counted on in the past were pulled to other English teaching assignments in our new Learning Communities Program, or expanded Regents Remediation offerings for students needing courses to prepare to retake the state mandated graduation exam. Soon I became the only full-time instructor teaching English 0099 with the other sections going to part-time faculty who taught, mostly, at night, communicating with me, primarily, through email.

This was not the first time State U., in line with university guidelines, reduced its developmental course offerings. Nearly a decade before I arrived, most system schools had done away with the Learning Support curriculum altogether, relegating it to nearby two-year colleges and technical schools. State U., along with a handful of other institutions with large numbers of non-traditional students, decided at that time to maintain the developmental studies program, rather than, like most of the other larger universities, mainstreaming students, or not admitting them at all. And even though our program remained relatively intact, it was seen by other departments on campus as

something likely temporary, sure to disappear when the state inevitably decided to halt remediation in four-year schools altogether. So the reduction in 2002 was expected, and, even to this day, the likelihood of further reductions looms over all of us who staff such programs in universities which still offer them.

The admissions changes in 2002 presented unique challenges for me and other Learning Support faculty. For one thing, second language students were no longer assigned to special ESL sections of English 0099; we just didn't have enough of them to guarantee such classes "making," enrolling at least 15 students. Our only option was to open all sections to native and non-native speakers. Thus, I could have an at-home mom going back to school for a nursing degree sitting alongside a recent émigré from Southeast Asia or Ukraine studying public administration. This phenomenon presented a welcome opportunity for me to finally revise how I was teaching basic writing and, in the process, reinvigorate my sense of commitment and professionalism. Sure the same exit requirements that previously influenced my pedagogical choices remained, but I now had to consider the implications of teaching "mixed" groups of native and non-native speakers.

In an effort to bridge the physical and cultural distance between the American and international students now populating each section of developmental writing, and to look closely at my own teaching, I designed an action research study investigating the impact of the culturally themed course content and group and dyadic writing activities on L1 and L2 students in developmental writing. My research questions were these:

- How do paired and group writing activities impact student perceptions of the usefulness of collaborative learning?

- How does enrollment in a culturally-themed writing class emphasizing paired and group learning affect intercultural attitudes?

I came to this topic in response to an assignment for an action research course I was taking at the time where each student was required to stage a concentrated (six-week) research project at his or her workplace, ideally, in order to employ the methodological components of action research we were learning: determining a problem in need of attention, developing actions to address the dilemma, using qualitative research methods to collect data (surveys, observations, interviews and such), analyzing and reflecting on the data extracted, and developing a plan of action for a future iteration.

The newly “mixed” developmental writing classes I was teaching seemed an appropriate setting for implementing the reflection and change that distinguishes action research from other forms of inquiry. For in these classes I had observed limited interaction among students from differing backgrounds, a condition that any teacher would want to rectify. Americans sat with Americans and international students sat with peers from their own countries or alone, rarely speaking to other classmates unless required by me. Curious if I could change this in a productive and respectful way, I searched the literature and came across two studies (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Ibrahim & Penfold, 2009) of mixed classes where, in both cases, the researchers noted how students tend to cluster among small pockets of international students (South American, African, Asian...) and other, discrete groups of American students (athletes, Northerners...), with interaction between the groups being minimal or non-existent.

In the literature, I read where professors even observed students coming early to class to guarantee herself a seat next to other international students (Ibrahim &

Penfield, 2009). Of course, it isn't remarkable that students tend to congregate with peers with similar backgrounds or interests. Over the years, I had observed athletes sitting by athletes, fine arts students clustered together and minority students connecting with one another affably during class. As Tatum (2003) notes, this behavior is just human nature, not reflective of any hostility or disfavor towards otherness but our herding instinct to be among those with whom we feel most comfortable, those who look, talk, and act in the ways that we find most familiar.

Even though it may be natural for students to arrange themselves in cliques, I thought it might be worthwhile for my mini-study to focus on dissolving some of the distance between groups of students in my developmental writing course through the implementation of collaborative learning activities that I would develop then monitor, recording observations, and assigning the students to write reflections on their group work. For although I had used small group work—primarily for peer review—in my 1101 classes, I had not used it much in English 0099, mostly due to the individualized exit requirements of an essay exam and, for some, final exit hurdle of a test of Standard Written English. Recognizing each student, regardless of ethnicity or any other identifying characteristic, had something to offer to his/her peers, I decided my project for the action research course would be a pilot study of the impact of small group interaction on the students' perceptions of collaborative learning and intercultural communication. Considering the brevity of the project, I was not able to collect a large amount of data, just my observation notes, a few student reflections following each small group session in which they met, and the culminating work projects they produced collaboratively. Nevertheless, that first experience of doing teacher research inspired

me to revisit the project, at greater length, when it became time to settle on a dissertation topic two years later.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I will describe how that six-week pilot project provided the foundation from which I developed the extended (two semester) action research study for this dissertation, where I significantly revised my developmental writing curriculum to get the students communicating more, and sharing their experiences and talents with one another. Following a discussion of the relevant research in the fields of basic writing and second language teaching and theory, I will describe the methodology I used for the study, then its findings and implications. Broadly speaking, my action research study examined the impact of paired and group work on the intercultural attitudes and feelings about collaborative learning among L1 and L2 (native and non-native English speaking) students enrolled in two sections of developmental writing I taught in 2011. For the project, the following data collection methods were used: surveys, classroom observations and field notes, handwritten student reflections, interviews and course artifacts prepared by the instructor (syllabi and assignment sheets) and students (final essay drafts). Before engaging with this action research project (from pilot study to two-semester inquiry) I had never done much qualitative research. Like my students who were new to the university, I was new to the role of teacher-researcher. However, just as most of them greeted the opportunity to improve their writing skills with enthusiasm, I hope this dissertation reflects the passion with which I administered this study. Although I was certainly a novice in this new role, like my first-year students, I was more often invigorated than disenchanted by the challenges posed by this endeavor.



This study responds to and builds on previous scholarship on writing groups, and the pedagogical choices I made were influenced by numerous compositionists and ESL specialists (David Bartholomae, Kenneth Bruffee, Linda Flower, Peter Elbow, Paul Kei Matsuda, Tony Silva, and others) who have written about basic writing, second language teaching, and collaborative learning, or have conducted studies on writing groups in the first year composition classroom. Chapter 2 summarizes the literature undergirding my teaching choices for this project with the ensuing chapters describing the methods of data collection used, the findings of the study, and the implications of this research on my campus and beyond.

The preceding teaching narrative and the chapters that follow reveal the efforts I have made to become a more “reflective practitioner” (Newton-Suter, 2006) as this has been, perhaps, the core impetus for undertaking this study. Teaching, like any profession, can become highly scripted, leading to redundancy and, inevitably, burn-out. And putting aside the time to become more reflective is so challenging for teachers who must spend so much of their free time grading papers, keeping up with the professional conversation, and preparing for class, so the opportunity that this project provided has not been lost on me, and I hope the ensuing chapters express the passion and dedication that propelled my efforts over the past three years.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

To study this rich network, we need to look not only at the individual writer but [...] his or her classroom, personal and institutional histories, and writers' and teachers' political hopes (Bizzell & Herzberg, 1996, p. 13).

This chapter presents relevant basic writing history, theory and research, focusing especially on published work from the last four decades, a period when basic writing issues have received considerable attention as evidenced by dozens of books and hundreds of articles in major English publications, including *College English*, *College Composition and Communication* and *The Journal of Basic Writing*. This brief overview will provide theoretical and practical background for the pedagogical choices I made when developing the curriculum for the classes I studied and is, therefore, not intended to be a comprehensive or definitive summary of basic writing scholarship of the past 40 years. Indeed, any static definition of basic writer or basic writing fails to express the wide range of experiences, cultures and pedagogies seen in introductory college writing classrooms.

The history presented here, followed by a more focused review of pertinent scholarship on mixed writing courses, collaborative and second language learning, merely seeks to lay out some theoretical background and definitions to situate my study in the broader conversation in the field and to familiarize the reader with some of the emergent trends that have characterized basic writing scholarship over the past several decades.

### **Extending the Privilege: Open Access Leads to an Emerging Field of Study**

The modern history of open admissions is often said to have begun with the rise of land grant universities in the nineteenth century when “the American college became transformed, moving increasingly toward a commitment to serving all citizens of society—not just an aristocratic elite” (Berlin, 1984, p. 58). Around the same time, the first basic writers (of English) arrived at Harvard which, in seeking to grow its enrollment, began admitting westerners whose writing skills lagged behind that of their Eastern prep-school educated counterparts (Ritter, 2002). The result was the establishment of the first entrance writing exam at Harvard, which most students failed, leading to the development of the first Ivy League college writing courses (Connors, 1984).

For the remainder of the 20th century more waves of basic writers enrolled in college, with the largest coming in the early 70s, filling seats vacated by graduated baby boomers in order to keep enrollments up at universities American universities (Stygall, 1989). This move toward increased access, thus, served progressive and practical ends. Certainly the backdrop of Vietnam protests, equal rights for women and Watergate did not impede the revolutionary spirit of opening college doors to the previously denied, but colleges also wanted to refill classrooms virtually emptied by the large populations of students matriculating during the post-war boom of the 50s and 60s. With this move toward increased access, basic writing became a viable field of scholarly inquiry, argued most prolifically by Mina Shaughnessy, who helped to start The City University of New York’s basic writing program and, in numerous articles and

conference speeches, eloquently described the liberal turn in education of open admissions and the emergence of a developmental literacy curriculum:

It was in such an atmosphere that the boldest and earliest attempts to build a comprehensive system of higher education began: in the spring of 1970, the City University of New York adopted an admissions policy that guaranteed to every city resident with a high school diploma a place in one of its eighteen tuition-free colleges (*Errors and Expectations*, 1979, p. 1).

Shaughnessy's impassioned commitment to teaching, speaking and publishing about SEEK (Search for Education Elevation and Knowledge) students "attracted the attention of colleges and universities in various parts of the country" inspiring many colleges and universities to develop their own basic writing programs with nearly three-fourths doing so by the mid-seventies (Maher, 1992, p. 24).

For nearly four decades, scholarly attention to the needs and experiences of basic writers and faculty has been vigorous, as evidenced by the many articles, books and conference presentations (let alone conferences) dedicated to the subject. During this period, compositionists have debated about the various ways of defining who basic writing are, how to teach them and the role universities play in admitting underprepared students and providing the appropriate support for their work. Although there has been much overlap and reconsideration of the various approaches taken by basic writing teachers and theorists, the following presentation of the major turns in the scholarly discussion uses chronology as a narrative framework to assist the reader in gaining a broad overview of how the conversation about basic writing evolved over the past forty years. This is not to say that certain movements, such as the one devoted to the writing

process, which saw significant attention in the early 80s, are no longer relevant to the classroom experience of basic writers, as it is unlikely that any teacher has fully divorced his or work from the process paradigm that emerged with such prominence in the early years of basic writing lore. No, the following discussion seeks to offer a mere outline of some of the major themes that emerged in discussions of basic writing in the academic venues where it has garnered so much attention.

### **Defining “Basic”**

In 1975, Shaughnessy and several colleagues at CUNY launched *Basic Writing* (later renamed *The Journal of Basic Writing*) which remains the central publication for teaching and research associated with the field. Early articles focused, unsurprisingly, on issues of error, syntax and revision. Indeed, the first significant book-length exploration of basic writing, Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* (1979), catalogued and evaluated the patterns of error in 4000 essays composed by SEEK students (Maher 1994, p. 125). Citing linguists, sociologists, psychologists and writing teachers, Shaughnessy challenged readers to reconsider error as less a function of limited ability or preparation but more often, in its labored syntax and usage, an attempt at sophistication, an academic style all writers find elusive upon first exposure. And although *Errors and Expectations* described the need for remedying the significant structural weaknesses characterizing the work of basic writers, in conference speeches and *JBW* articles, Shaughnessy and others (Farrell, 1983; Epes, 1985) warned against teachers focusing exclusively on error and expressed concern for the clinical terminology used in describing basic writing “much as doctors tend to discuss their

patients” (Shaughnessy, 1976, p. 234). Nevertheless, error became the focus of much of the early discussion of basic writing, as it was the distinguishing feature of the work of novice writers whether in grade school or college.

In “The Study of Error” (1980) David Bartholomae, taking a cue from Shaughnessy’s characterization of basic writer’s attempts at academic discourse, named the students’ awkward sentence constructions an “interlanguage,” their fledgling attempt to sound collegiate and sophisticated that falls short due to lexical or structural limitations and, in some cases, dialect interference as linguistic minority students allowed their home speechways to creep into their writing. Bartholomae also observed students reading past their errors or reading in corrections when reading aloud, indicating that perceived mistakes are sometimes just typos which go unnoticed or at least uncorrected during revision. When the students read their work aloud, they would speak the corrections but not record them on their drafts. Thus, consistent errors of grammar and usage could not be generalized across all basic writers he studied since they differed based each student’s unique background (age, ethnicity and home language) and attention to detail during the revision stage.

Bartholomae arrived at his conclusions through the use of qualitative research methods common to early studies of student writing: observation, protocol analysis (tape recordings of students talking through their writing processes) and textual evaluation. Indeed, these data collection methods would come to characterize inquiry in the field of composition studies, particularly, in the research on process (Emig, 1971; Flower & Hayes, 1981; Flower, 1988) which would often employ speak-aloud protocols where students, as they did during proofreading in Bartholomae’s study, would be

recorded while they spoke through each step of the writing process: prewriting, drafting and revision.

In their study of basic writers' compositions, Thomas Farrell (1983) and Mary Epes (1985) saw error as mainly the product of an interfering dialect, particularly that of African-American basic writing students who retained, in their writing, aspects of speech that contrasted with Standard Written English yet still successfully conveyed meaning. To remedy the spelling and agreement problems she saw in these students' essays, such as their omission of the –s ending to third person singular verbs (she talks), Epes suggested that students should be taught the grammar rules they apparently missed in their previous learning. This common sense approach based in the tradition of structural linguistics, which still informs English teaching in elementary and secondary education, can be seen in the proliferation of sentence skills workbooks and basic grammar handbooks used in basic writing classes of that era. Farrell argued that such a pedagogy, one which sought to strip dialect from written composition, would inevitably lead students to better thinking and writing.

Clearly, in the 70s, the primary role of the basic writing teacher, as described in the literature, would be to move student work closer to the prescribed structures and usage of style manuals and handbooks. This likely served the needs of both faculty and students, in that faculty could feel confident in their teaching efficacy through the observation of their students' improved error vigilance and the students would feel gratified by their improving sentence writing skills. Whether these accomplishments yielded improved critical thinking or essay development was open for debate. However, this model of basic writing instruction still characterizes discussions of remediation

during the 70s and figured prominently in published description of basic writing programs in that time.

The first descriptions of basic writing courses during what might be called the product-centered era of instruction are presented in great detail in one of the first collections solely devoted to remedial college writing instruction, *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers and Administrators* (1980) in which teachers describe courses, writing centers and tutoring programs focused on improving open admissions students' sentence and paragraph skills. Patrick Hartwell, who would later repudiate the emphasis placed on grammar in early basic writing classes, described how students in his college, through assignments from a common course text that presented the rules of Standard Written English, students expected to eliminate from their writing any non-standard features through exposure to contrastive illustrations of dialectical and correct English usage. By juxtaposing incorrect and correct usage, students were expected to internalize the differences and, thus, correct sentence errors on worksheets and textbook exercises.

Other chapters in the collection provided similar descriptions of courses, even writing "laboratories," following the clinical terminology of the time. This current-traditional pedagogy of grammar, usage, sentence combining and paragraph writing, is well described by Richard Young (1978) as:

the emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process; the analysis of discourse into description, narration, exposition and argument; the strong concern with usage (syntax, spelling, punctuation) and with style (economy, clarity, emphasis); and so on (p. 31).



Although many compositionists have written in opposition to the current traditional model it likely remains popular in basic writing classes for its promise of correctness and predictable organization, particularly in programs where students are required to pass exit exams which frequently demand they locate and correct flaws in sentence construction and wording or, in responding to an essay prompt, compose relatively error-free prose.

Nevertheless, even though much of the literature indicates that error-correction and proper syntax were stressed in basic writing courses in the late 70s and early 80s, some authors at that time (Halstead, 1975; Rose, 1980) suggested that direct teaching of grammar and structure, in its limited emphasis on error correction and over-formulized sentences and essays, might impede student writing, making it “simple and safe rather than urging them toward the ambitious experimentation that will enhance their linguistic repertoire” (Rose , p.114). To this day, debate continues over how much attention should be given to grammar and usage in basic writing courses with some instructors continuing to focus on discrete rules and sentence-level drills and others addressing error only in the context of the revision stage of the writing process, perhaps during peer review.

During the same period, for some researchers, the basic writer’s perceived limitations were not just considered linguistic but also psychological. In “The Content of Basic Writers’ Essays” (1980), Andrea Lunsford explored the cognitive dimension of basic writing, drawing on the work of Piaget and Kohlberg in her conclusion that basic writers’ compositions “ reflect the egocentric stage of psychological development and the conventional stage of moral development” (p. 284). By interviewing basic writers

then collecting and analyzing their output, Lunsford theorized that the distinguishing characteristics of their work and thoughts therein were akin to the black and white perception of the world common to adolescent ideation rather than the nuanced adult perspective seen in more capable college students. As Wendy Bishop (1999) reflected on this period of basic writing research, the cognitivist portrayed the remedial writing student

as someone who is rule-governed (generally inappropriately so), who has trouble imagining audiences other than himself, who doesn't value "school" writing and who has inflexible revising and writing strategies and an underdeveloped sense of the composing process (p. 10).

Bishop's retrospective critique of the cognitivists' reductive appraisals of basic writers, which essentialized these students as not just intellectually but personally immature and unsophisticated was shared by scholars writing in the period (Rose, 1980, 1988; Bizzell, 1982).

Mike Rose (1988) knew all too well the impact researchers and faculty making generalizations about the backgrounds and capabilities of students placed in the college-preparatory curriculum, having been misplaced himself in such a program. Fearing that such an overemphasis on classifying basic writers not just for their practical but also psychological limitations might only aid in further marginalizing these students, Patricia Bizzell (1982) described this way of looking at developmental writers as an "inner directed cognitive deficiency model" where, as will be described in the next section, she favored the "outer-directed sociolinguistic model" that explores social and political rather than structural dynamics influencing basic writers' efforts. Bizzell favored

a more “outer-directed” approach that focused on moving basic writers from whichever stage of development they had reached into the discourse practices valued by the university.

It should be noted that, Lunsford, Rose, Bizzell and other basic writing theorists shifted their perspectives and pedagogies as more study and meaningful discussion of the subject proceeded and evolved in the 80s and, especially, 90s, when the politics of remediation brought basic writing into the foreground in the professional conversation taking place in composition studies. Therefore, to label any basic writing theorist or practitioner as a devotee of a single approach (current-traditional, process...) likely oversimplifies that teacher’s pedagogy which is probably better defined as a hybrid of the methods presented in this overview of how the subject has been defined and redefined by those who have written about their work in the field.

### **Emphasizing Process over Product**

While some compositionists were targeting error or cognition in their research and teaching, others were looking at basic writers’ composing processes. This turn hearkened back to the work a decade earlier of Janet Emig (1971) and James Britton (1975) who studied the composing processes of middle and high school students. Through extensive interviewing and compose-aloud protocols (recordings) of high school seniors, Emig determined that students used what she termed “reflexive” or “extensive” approaches to writing. Noting that the “reflexive” mode (personal writing) yielded the most thoughtful and fluid writing process, Emig called for greater incorporation of such assignments alongside to the more typical “extensive”

(traditionally academic) work which she, through her interviews and recordings, found stifling to student engagement and originality with most students dispatching with the writing process quickly and, generally, inefficiently.

Britton's (1975) study of the writing processes of students ranging in age from 11 to 18 led him to similarly label their work as either poetic, expressive or transactional, with the latter, which Emig had labeled "extensive," again resulting in students being much more passive in the process of relaying another's knowledge whereas, when given the opportunity for creativity, students would spend much more time drafting and revising their work, showing greater pride in the quality and originality of their efforts. One can easily see the impact of Emig's and Britton's work on modern elementary and secondary education where students are still introduced to composition through assignments that allow them to write poetically or anecdotally. At the college level, however, such an approach has often been greeted with circumspection for its apparent divergence from the transactional genres associated with academic discourse.

Maxine Hairston called this change from looking at student essays to the ways they assemble them a paradigm shift from current-traditional, product (style and structure) oriented teaching to a process-centered approach with studies of refocusing on how compositions are written and who writes them. Using protocol analysis, case study and interviews targeting the writing processes that lead to error-plagued writing, Sondra Perl (1979) saw consistencies among her students which indicated an ongoing preoccupation with lexical or sentence correction, not the more sophisticated reconsiderations of perspective or development seen with more skilled college writers. Focusing only on basic writers' revision strategies, Nancy Sommers (1980) also

observed this fixation on editing over deep revision, where basic writers attend to surface features, never considering how a thesis might change or that deviating from prescribed paragraph or essay formulae might enhance their writing. Linda Flower (1988) saw how particular assignments influenced students' writing processes and how students must consider the expectations of readers (prediction, interpretation and organization) when developing their essays. Flower suggested that the writing process should be presented as more fluid than linear or mono-directional (prewriting, writing, revising), in that the writer's approach to a given assignment might change depending on the topic or course and may require a recursive movement back and forth between stages of developing the essay.

Influenced by these studies, some writing teachers experimented with a more scaffolded, process approach to composition instruction; rather than a current-traditional approach where grammar might be taught in discrete units and up to ten essays collected and graded each term, students would be walked through the writing process itself, perhaps composing four or five essays each term, but in multiple drafts, with wording and sentence concerns moving into focus as part of the revision stage, not addressed separately through the drilling and quizzing that characterized the current-traditional paradigm. Although the literature of the time certainly encouraged teachers to look more closely at students' writing processes than the errors in the compositions, instructors relegated to teaching college writing, basic or otherwise, due to busy teaching loads and minimal support for scholarship, may have lacked the time or inclination to keep up with the scholarly conversation, focusing more on the work at hand: teaching multiple sections of writing and grading hundreds of essays each term.

Nevertheless, for compositionists who had access to the professional discussion of the time--whether through their own faculty development efforts, conference attendance or research—process-theory likely influenced their classroom choices if only in permitting students to submit multiple drafts of their work or having them work with peers during the revision stage. To this day, it is unlikely that any teacher of English composition hasn't used peer review in some way in his or her classes.

The emphasis on process would not just involve the stages of developing an essay, as researchers soon began investigating the broader process of academic enculturation which basic writers experienced, often most saliently in gateway courses like developmental reading and English. In reflecting on the various process theories extolled in the 70s and 80s—from expressivism to transactional frameworks—Lester Faigley (1986), in reflecting on the process movement in composition, acknowledged the strengths of all process pedagogies as well as the benefits to the field of the employment of the qualitative research methodologies from which they emerged. However, he ultimately favored a social process theory that, in reflecting the broader direction in which the scholarly discussion was moving, emphasized the social systems informing student knowledge (the various home and classroom discourse communities contextualizing student perspectives) as worth considering when studying and teaching the academic writing process. After all, college students often take writing courses in their first semesters, when they have just transitioned from high school or work to the academy which, to basic writers, could be a leap not just in sophistication and workload but in custom and culture.

### **Joining the Academic Discourse Community**

By the mid-80s, authors appeared to be less concerned by the distance between the basic writer and Standard English than the distance between these students' thought processes and that required by what would be termed the "academic discourse community," the unique yet, to the basic writer, oftentimes elusive language practices valued by the university. As Bizzell (1986) described it, basic writing students, in order to gain command of the college mind-set and literacy demands, must "go native," transitioning from the many unique home discourses to that favored by the academy. Joseph Harris (1989) saw this struggle as "less one of intelligence than socialization" since basic writers were "simply unused to the peculiar demands of academic discourse" (16). This process of repositioning students would lead to the introduction of varied pedagogical techniques geared at introducing them to academic ways of knowing and writing, including but not limited to collaborative learning (Bruffee 1984; 1988), transition-themed course readings (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986), and a much more student-centered approach to course content and delivery, inviting students to even apply their own critical attention to the politics of remediation and academic enculturation (Lu, 1992).

Mike Rose understood this process well, since he had been misplaced into the vocational track in high school and, upon entering college, found the new discourse net nearly inaccessible. *Lives on the Boundary* (1981) chronicles Rose's journey from the inner-city to academy revealing how underprepared, often working class students are not handicapped in terms of ability, just lacking the requisite familiarity with academic

ways of thought and composition. Thus, in later articles, Rose called on teachers to stop seeing basic writing courses as remediation but as entre to the rhetorical customs of their new university context. In doing so, he described a variety of approaches to achieve this task, from students working with primary and secondary sources while composing their own personal narratives to collaborative pedagogies requiring students to read and discuss, in small groups, sophisticated academic texts.

Perhaps the most well-known and detailed presentation of this type of course is presented in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* (1986) where they describe the University of Pittsburgh course in "Growth and Change in Adolescence" which, through intensive reading and writing, takes students from personal to academic renderings of adolescent transition from a range of cultural and disciplinary perspectives. By applying academic research on adolescence to their own personal narratives of growth—through readings in anthropology, psychology and sociology—the students are shown how their own life stories can grant them access to the academic community. The University of Pittsburgh model, so to speak, was also unique for extending the basic writing course from the more typical three to six hours, thereby more realistically granting students the time needed to make significant gains in the reading, writing and critical thinking skills. Thus, rather than requiring students to take separate developmental writing and reading courses, students would be offered a synthesis of the two through a course that draws on both skills (reading and writing) in an effort to facilitate the students' transition from personal to academic ways of knowing.

Some authors (Fox, 1990; Lu, 1992) took issue with the notion that academic and personal discourses were so monolithic in that one could transition from one to the



other as if each were stable or independently coherent systems of thought and language. Tom Fox (1990) thought such distinctions drew too sharp a contrast between the student's language practices and those expected in college writing courses:

By overstating the differences between academic discourse and students' discourse, especially by attributing differences to linguistic habits or cognitive conventions, we send a message to those who are most uncomfortable, most anxious about the status of their language in the university (71).

Fox suggested that basic writers should be encouraged to see various discourses as different, rather than privileging one over another. That way, they would learn to be more reflective about the ways language is generated in the numerous contexts in which it is employed, not just by contrasting one form (personal) with another (academic).

Min Zhan Lu (1992) wondered if mastery of the academic oeuvre as the sole aim of composition teaching might aid in continuing to silence the marginalized voices of novice writers, leading to acculturation or, at best, biculturalism, where students essentially put on an academic mask in the classroom which comes off at home. Lu (1994) felt this "discursive schizophrenia" threatened what she considered the basic writer's preferable location on boundaries of a range of discourses academic and otherwise. Ultimately, Lu questioned the realism and practicality of essentializing academic discourse as something "discrete, fixed and unified," wondering if the basic writing course shouldn't question the power structures that have relegated as *other* basic writers, women, laborers, essentially any marginalized group needing repositioning to achieve success. Lu and others (Saint-Amand, 1990; Horner, 1992)

called for a critical pedagogy where “student experience [is] recovered from the margins to which many students have been relegated” (Horner, p. 8). Paulo Freire (1970) challenged educators to, along with their students, explore the politically oppressive dynamics at play in the elite academic culture which had, for a century in America, defined students and manufactured a curriculum that served merely to reify the power rather than intellectual interests of a country more focused on production and capital than culture and collaboration.

Criticism of the initiative model would be addressed, perhaps, more pragmatically by theorists and compositionists (Harris, 1989/1995; Pratt, 1991) whose work emphasized a more descriptive, less political, survey of the diversity of discourses brought together in the classroom. Joseph Harris (1989) suggested that the job of the writing teacher is not to “initiate our students into the values and practices of some new community, but to offer them a chance to reflect critically on those discourses [...] to which they already belong” (p. 19). Harris (1995) envisioned basic writing classrooms, borrowing from Mary Louise Pratt’s (1991) terminology, as “contact zones,” those “spaces where cultures meet, class and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (p. 34). Harris ultimately contended that writing teachers needed to teach students not just how to articulate their differences but to “bring them into useful relation with each other” (p. 35). This could be accomplished in almost any genre of academic writing, from personal, reflective writing to exposition and persuasion with the classroom itself becoming a contact zone in which a wide range of voices are heard and valued.

Building on the work of discourse community and contact zone theorists, compositionists in the 90s (Soliday, 1994; Anokye, 1994) had students consider their own language histories just as ethnographers might study orality and literacy in a given community. For Mary Soliday (1994) classroom diversity led to her use of literacy narratives when teaching basic writing:

Literacy narratives can expand students' sense of personal agency when they discover not only that their own stories are narratable, but also that through their stories they can engage in a broader critical dialogue with each other and with well-known texts" (158).

Soliday even used Mike Rose and Min Zhan Lu's academic literacy narratives among other more well-known authors' stories (Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Willy Russell's, *Educating Rita*), as models for students writing their own histories of language learning and application. Soliday wanted her students to see, especially, how a professor of composition (Lu) learned English, first in school in China and through working at home with a tutor—the experience of learning English in a non/limited English speaking country then transitioning to America where the learning continues, often differently and more stressfully. In providing this narrative foundation for her student's output, she reveals how Lu's story reflects the typical silence we see from ESL students in mixed classes, a silence born more of fear (of peers, failure...) than inability. By bringing in the work of popular writers, the students would see, as well, how one's educational history could draw an audience far beyond the academy, reinforcing the significance of their work, despite its being, sometime disparagingly, labeled as basic or developmental.

Akua Anokye (1994), who taught classes populated by students from broadly varied backgrounds (Africa, Japan, South America...) described an oral narrative assignment to help students recognize and appreciate diversity of classmates and to assist them in developing topic possibilities for essays: telling familiar folk-tales, family stories and personal life narratives before considering themes of stereotyping, difference, culture and history (more academically) in later work. Not only did she find this to mitigate any hesitance about participation that might have been anticipated in a contact zone of varied ethnic voices, but she actually saw students open up as they shared folktales and family stories in oral presentations. Like Soliday, she observed growing student enthusiasm and diminishing reticence as they vigorously engaged with one another's stories and the implications therein.

### **A Period of Reflection and Transformation**

At the close of the millennium, it was clear that basic writing teachers were seeing new possibilities for student (literate) engagement once they pushed skill-building and process discussions into the background and helped the students discover the texts waiting to be written about their own lives and how they are relevant and consistent with that of others in and out of the college writing classroom. However, the status of basic writing programs and teachers remained, at best, tenuous. For just as the progressive political landscape of the 70s gave way to a surge in college open admissions, the impact of a conservative and increasingly meritocratic view of higher education would put basic writing programs in the cross-hairs of politicians and administrators more focused on prestige graduation rates than college access.

The 90s introduced various reconsiderations on who basic writers were and how they should be taught. New ways of teaching courses were presented as well, again reflecting the experimental nature of the conceptual history of basic writing. However, the period is perhaps best noted for the ways politics and institutional history/influence crept into the picture as well with the proliferation of mainstreaming initiatives where universities placed basic writing students in general education composition classes rather than those geared exclusively to the needs of underprepared students. Indeed, by the mid-90s, many universities enacted policies which eliminated basic writing from their campuses at least in name whether to increase the perceived prestige of the institution or to shift the burden of remedial education to two-year colleges or vocational schools.

Perhaps most famously, in 1994, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani targeted open admissions at the City University of New York, the very site of early basic writing lore and study. Soliday ("2001) saw basic writing programs as easy targets for racial casting or being perceived as permitting underachievement, thereby diminishing reputation of universities and thus often hidden or, as became the case in the 90s, eliminated. Ira Shore explained the motivation behind this shift when he described basic writing programs as "ghettoizing," reifying status quo that makes these students marginal participants in higher education, having been placed in skills-based course rather than one that can introduce them to rhetorical skills necessary for academic sophistication.

This is not to say that mainstreaming occurred in all universities at that time—though it certainly continues to spread—but when discussions of whether or not to

eliminate basic writing programs occurred, as McKenny (2001) stated, mainstreaming often won out:

The question may not turn out to be whether mainstreaming is the best option for basic writers, but whether it may be the case that it is the only option provided to these students, given the moves being made toward the elimination of basic writing classes in many 4-year colleges and university systems (Foreward vii).

In response to this scrutiny of developmental studies and its ultimate removal from many campuses across the nation, compositionists responded philosophically and pragmatically. Bartholomae (1993) wondered if basic writing hadn't become such a known entity with an apparently fluid history that its vitality as a space for tension and debate had diminished. Arguing against basic writing's institutionalization, Bartholomae endorsed Pratt's "contact zone" metaphor for its potential to revitalize the classroom as a setting for students to share their stories with academic purpose and personal investment. Those more open to mainstreaming or who were already dealing with it (Elbow, 1993; Grego & Thompson, 1993; Soliday, 1996) sought ways to accommodate this institutional imperative while not sacrificing the academic integrity of their writing programs. After all, putting these students in the regular first-year course would only add diversity of many kinds, thus fulfilling the progressive vision of open admissions while removing the stigma oft-associated with remediation.

Mary Soliday (1996) described a mainstreaming initiative where the typical general education writing course was stretched into two semesters to address the unique needs of students previously required a basic writing course before admission to the core. The year-long stretch class allowed students to investigate "language

diversity” in the first term and “sociocultural difference” in the second. Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson’s (1993) response to state-mandated mainstreaming was to develop a “writing studio.” Drawing on feminist and third space theory, they turned an un-used room in the English building at their university into a special writing center where mainstreamed freshman workshopped their essays with peers and a graduate student leader: no grammar drills or one-on-one tutoring, just writerly conversation among students looking for support and encouragement. Elbow (1993) proposed a blending of these strategies, suggested a “yogurt” model where students leave the writing studio and get their basic writing credit whenever the complete portfolio requirements/assessment, so they can move to the second composition course even during the first semester.

Some authors were more circumspect about mainstreaming. Adams (1993) worried that basic writing courses allow colleges to “track” students into remediation much like high schools do with vocational placement—usually ethnic minorities from lower socio-economic rungs—leading to segregation and its onerous implications. Therefore, he called on programs to first collect data about such programs and whether first-year composition curricula should be reconfigured to embrace more diversity, possibly through voluntary mainstreaming. Collins and Lynch (2001) agreed that the choice of continuing basic writing courses or moving students into college-level writing with some assistance should be informed by institutional context: how placement is done, needs of local population, credit or non-credit curricula, whether programs or courses are needed. Studies done in the New Jersey and California State systems had

already shown that retention and progression of students was best facilitated by stand-alone basic writing programs (White, 2001).

With numerous calls for teachers to get to know their students beyond the restrictive moniker of basic writer, it was inevitable that studies emphasizing the diversity of background and ability of students so classified would soon appear in the mid to late 90s and later. Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* (1997) does just that, providing the "first longitudinal study of writing and learning at a college level that takes into account not only students' academic lives but also their personal lives" (Liese, 1999). Sternglass found that basic writers, while struggling to learn the academic idiom, also attempted to bring their "cultural heritage into a meaningful relationship with the academic culture" (81).

Where the early conclusions of Shaughnessy and others suggested errors to be basic writers' most distinguishing characteristic, through Sternaglass's study, a more complicated portrait of these students began to emerge, one marked more by what might be termed the extra-academic influences of culture and history, that could (should) be tapped as potential for reflective and thoughtful entre to post-secondary education, which should continue to value diverse and democratic values. Sternaglass cautions, however, that drawing certainties from her work would be misreading its intentions: to be more descriptive than prescriptive, to invite further research and scholarly conversation with the aim of challenging what appears to be an ongoing political and institutional divesting of programs geared at such students.

Clearly, the process movement of the 70s and 80s had given way to a more political and philosophical discussion of the basic writing classroom as a setting for a



much greater variety of emergent pedagogies as diverse as the students enrolling in composition courses, whether developmental or college-level. In fact, the next decade of professional conversation in the field is often labeled “post-process” since it is characterized by scholarship that often questions whether the process theory guiding much of the teaching in writing courses offers students the best opportunity for growth as critical thinkers and writers.

Gary Olson (1999) critiqued process pedagogies for being as restrictive and presumptuous as the taxonomies of classical rhetoric and modes of development (narrative, *descriptio*, example) and grammar drills associated with current traditionalism. Lad Tobin summarized the growing disfavor with the limitations of most process-oriented classroom:

The criticism of process for promoting a view of writing that was too rigid and that ignored differences of race, class, and gender became an outright rejection of process for its naively positivist notions of language, truth, self, authorship, and individual agency (p. 15)

Schreiner (1997) similarly faulted process theory for overlooking the individual student’s capacity, cultural background and experiences, thereby seeking a one-size-fits-all model of composing and revising.

Post-process authors favored something less wedded to structure and taxonomy, something more fluid (or Zen, as Olson suggests), not the hierarchical process paradigm of assertion which doesn’t hold up under postmodern critique for its totalizing, essentialist denial of local knowledge and practice. In doing so, Olson asked teachers to free themselves by rethinking assumptions about assertion-driven writing

processes which mistakenly positions the composing process, with its thesis statements and supporting details, as a form of truth-finding immune to critical consideration and contestation. Citing Suzanne Harding's (1995) feminist challenge to andro/Eurocentric objectivity, Olson offered that the field of composition would do well to critique its own penchant for crafting master narratives and theories by repositioning itself as a place for theory building more so than application.

In the midst of the scholarly reconsiderations of where basic writing had been and where it might be going, some authors wondered if oversimplifying the field's pedagogical history into eras such as current-traditional or post-process, in reflecting an instability or lack of certainty when it came to how best to serve basic writers, might contribute to the diminishing of its status of developmental writing programs and practitioners, much less whether it should even be considered a legitimate and vital site of serious academic inquiry. Jean Gunner (1998) questioned the restraints imposed by iconic discourse which seeks to make heroic certain figures like Mina Shaughnessy, thereby arresting critical discourse which seeks to theorize and politicize aspects of the work of these figures who have been idealized for so long, perhaps without the scrutiny their work deserves. In doing so, Del Principe (2004) challenged the "linear narrative of writing ability" building on Mike Rose's (1988) earlier doubts about cognitive assessments of basic writers presented in the lore which describes such students as only able to move in scaffolded stages from sentence to paragraph to essay. Critical of this "cognitive deficiency" model, Del Principe advocated getting them right into textual research and analysis, seeing them as "literate performers."

Brodkey (1989) and Stygall (1994) further challenged previous assumptions about basic writers' usefulness in the academy by linking their work to that of graduate students. Seeing the basic writer as engendering a necessary resistance to the privilege and authority afforded academic discourse, Brodkey introduced a "Literacy Letters" project where graduate students and adult basic writers became pen-pals, revealing the necessity for frank discussions of power and race in the ways the TAs and students interact in the basic writing curriculum. By analyzing the letters written by the graduate students and basic writers she noted how much more willingly the latter brought up the topics of race and class, in contrast to the TA's avoidance of such discussion. Stygall (1994) employed a similar letter project between graduate students and basic writers to show how graduate student letter writing, in being longer though far more neutral and avoiding of privilege, sidesteps the very issues (class, power...) that are so salient to the basic writing dilemma.

### **Epilogue as Prologue**

Although many four year institutions discontinued formal basic writing courses in the mid-nineties, essentially rerouting underprepared students to community colleges with expansive college-prep offerings, some universities, like mine, still offered developmental writing classes. Today these students are as diverse in background and circumstances as are the ways in which they are integrated into the colleges where they study. In community colleges, regional universities and private colleges that still offer basic writing courses, non-traditional native and non-native evening students enter developmental courses with the hope of exiting to work in earnest on a degree in order

to get a promotion or better job. At larger universities that have done away with basic writing courses, recent high school graduates with limited proficiency are mainstreamed into the credit-level writing course, supplemented by visits to the writing center.

In composition journals, at conferences and in essay collections the scholarly conversation continues to explore the political, philosophical and pragmatic implications of teaching novice writers the skills necessary for success in college and beyond. Again, the overview presented here does not purport to be comprehensive; indeed, considering the focus of my study, some gaps should be conspicuous: few articles referenced here mention second language issues in the basic writing classroom and few examples of actual teaching strategies or assignments are found. However, published histories of basic writing often emphasize the same concepts (error, process, discourse communities...) and figures (Shaughnessy, Rose, Bizzell, Lu) cited here, as these topics and the work of these authors have become the signposts (Mutnick, 2001) which continue to influence the conversation in print and conference venues dedicated to the subject. This is not a justification for what might be seen as oversimplified and unproblematic, almost too linear, even predictable, to be believed. Indeed, the following sections on ESL pedagogy and theory seek to fill in some of these gaps and problematize some of what has been discussed previously. Nevertheless, the period surveyed here, from open admissions to mainstreaming, represents a significant era in post-secondary education paralleling the years of my early development as a teacher when I was first introduced to basic writing as both a graduate student and practitioner. The intervening decade since has led me back to the research, now focusing on where

second language learners fit into the equation and how theory and practice can merge to formulate a pedagogy of culture and collaboration.

### **ESL Theory and Practice: Parallels and Intersections**

Since American universities have admitted ESL students for decades, a substantial body of literature exists about teaching writing to these students. However, much of this canon has been largely published in other venues than those which discuss basic writing it applies to native speakers in ESOL collections and journals such as *ELT Journal*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *Language Learning*, and *TESOL Quarterly*. Matsuda (2000) noted that the field of basic writing, particularly as described in *The Journal of Basic Writing*, has addressed ESL issues from its inception in 1975. And Mina Shaughnessy, albeit briefly, mentioned these students, conflating their needs with those of native speakers, in *Errors and Expectations* which some ESL theorists questioned for its application for second language learners. The one area on which early ESL and basic writing specialists agreed was the need for emphasizing grammar in writing courses for native and non-native students. Ann Raimés (1991) divided the emergent traditions in ESL theory and pedagogy into four periods or stages:

**Table1:** Four Traditions in ESL Studies (Raimés, 1991)

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Teaching and Theory</b>
1960s and 70s	Practicing spelling, sentence structure and rhetorical forms of target language, much like

	early native speaker learning in grade school.
Mid 70s	Influence of composition theory on ESL teaching, particularly its focus on process, with students led through composition of multiple drafts.
1980s	Shift from process-orientation to more reader based considerations, not in terms of product as in the early days, but whether the writing was viable academic discourse.
Late 1980s	Greater emphasis on student diversity and contrastive rhetoric.

### **A Familiar Story: From Error to Process (and back)**

Representative of early second language pedagogical theory was Anita Pincas's (1962) description of an ESL approach informed by structural linguistics: drills on vocabulary and sentence structure, including pronunciation with the course texts and instructor modeling the target language for imitation by the students. Much like the current traditionalism at root in much of the basic writing literature of the same era, ESL teaching, as discussed in the journal articles published at the time, was very much product centered, with the added emphasis on oral performance for non-native speakers. Wilga M. Rivers (1968) described this audiolingual method as a simultaneous process where students wrote, mimicking the oral structures being expressed by the

teacher with the goal of reproducing error-free Standard English and correct sentence construction not unlike the way foreign language was taught in grade school. This sentence emphasis was typically joined with paragraph and short essay-length writing tasks where students would display, for example, proper verb tenses based on the genre in which they were writing (i.e. past tense for narration and present tense for classification). Since accurate spelling and sentence building was the general focus, researchers began to observe error consistency among ESL students, based on their spoken and written output, suggesting contrasting rhetorics (Kaplan, 1966) among classmates which derived from structural and discursive characteristics seen in their native languages.

Prefiguring Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* by over a decade, Robert Kaplan (1966) attributed structural errors in ESL writing not to poor thinking but to the syntactical and semantic rules they learned in acquiring native language proficiency. For example, a student from Mexico or South America might assume that consecutive independent clauses can be separated by commas rather than periods or semi-colons since that was what they learned in school when writing in Spanish. Therefore, when they did the same when writing in English, it should not been seen as them getting it wrong but, rather, applying what they had previously understood to be correct to the way they approached composing in a foreign language, with the tacit assumption that any rules of structure or form from their native language applied to any language they might learn.

Kaplan's study led to further research on contrastive rhetoric and became the target of heated debate over how much emphasis should be placed on grammar and

structure in the ESL classroom. In retrospect, Kaplan's work is now considered visionary for its development of structural and rhetorical models of world languages as he observed their application in his students' hybrid writing which merged their native language rules with their attempts at Standard English (Silva & Matsuda, 2001). Plus, Kaplan's contributions led to a new research agenda where the students' cultural backgrounds became more significant in explaining their output and developing a pedagogy that would best serve them.

Although Kaplan's work certainly moved the focus from error to its causes, Vivian Zamel (1976; 1978) was among the first to question product-orientation of most ESL teaching--particularly its emphasis on strong basic sentence patterns, correct word choice and paragraph coherence—which she believed lacked an empirical basis. Zamel (1976) suggested error correction didn't prepare students to write well but merely to proof-read effectively. While she acknowledged that correctness is always an expected goal of college English teaching, she felt the “primary emphasis should be on the expressive and creative process of writing” (33-34). Citing the research done in English composition studies at the time (Emig, 1971; Britton, 1975), Zamel favored process pedagogies, leading to a broader discussion this paradigm shift and its implications for the ESL classroom (Watson, 1982; Raimes, 1983, Spack, 1984). This is not to say that all ESL theorists willingly embraced the process movement. Although many contemporary writing theorists and teachers endorse the latter, when it comes to the teaching of basic writing and ESL it can be assumed that the current-traditional paradigm is still favored, particularly in programs where exit requirements involve standardized tests or essay exams. Nevertheless, some published research on the



writing processes of ESL students (Raimes, 1983; Diaz, 1986) suggests that process pedagogies have been effective in second language learning classes.

Diana Diaz 's (1986) ethnographic study of the writing practices of ESL students revealed that the research-guided process methodologies used more typically with native speakers work just as well with second language learners, moving them further toward the rhetorical skills (audience awareness, thesis development, varying perspectives) expected in college-level writing. Applying the methods of inquiry used by native language composition researchers at the time (observation, recording and textual analysis), Ann Raimes (1983) studied "unskilled" ESL writers to determine what aspects of their writing processes could be improved. By teaching students, initially, the art of narration and its attendant emphasis on authorial voice and syntactic fluidity, Zamel (1978) had previously observed her own ESL students writing with more confidence and volume than when writing in the more academic genres of exposition or persuasion. This is not to say that an ESL college composition course would be a story writing course but that narrative and description might be stressed early in the term as a means to get students composing more freely while learning the particulars of wording and sentence structure unique to the target language, not unlike the transitional model (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Bizzell, 1988) prescribed at the time for basic writers which starts with their writing in more familiar genres before moving to more sophisticated modes of discourse.

Some ESL specialists remained cautious about the pedagogical efficacy of process teaching, as they saw their students' most pressing needs still to be linguistic or at least syntactic. Delpit (1988) wondered if focusing on the writing process rather than

correctness might put off non-native speakers whose primary goal of English education is to sound (and write) with the vocabulary and fluidity of their peers, regardless of any discrete process used for a given assignment. She feared, as well, that students might get the mistaken impression that the written product's quality was secondary to the process by which it was composed, thereby devoting more time to early stages like outlining and drafting than to what they (the students) perceived to be the most important aspect of writing, revising for accuracy and correctness. Others (Holiday, 1994; Hyland, 2003) were concerned that ESL students, depending on their native learning contexts, might not feel comfortable with aspects of process-learning, particularly writing from a personal rather than detached viewpoint—something that may be prized in western culture but may have been discouraged in their previous schooling at home.

Perhaps the more balanced appraisal of benefits of incorporating process elements into ESL teaching came from Ulla Connor (1988), who advocated the use of both sentence and process-based analysis to develop a theory and pedagogy for second language acquisition that fused the best aspects of the product and process approaches. After all, it was highly unlikely that ESL teachers would fully dispart with the attention to error and sentence structure that has been the hallmark of ESL pedagogy for decades to fully adopt an approach endorsed by scholars more familiar with the writing and composing process of strictly native speakers. And to assume that compositionists were not evaluating student writing for its fluidity and correctness would be a mischaracterization of the process approach, which involved (peer) proofreading

and revision throughout all stages of composition, not just with final drafts but even during outlining and freewriting.

### **Discourse Communities and Contact Zones**

Influenced by the instructional and theoretical conversation taking place in the broader field of composition, in the late 80s, ESL publications began to include discussion of transitioning students into the academic discourse community. In some cases (Reppen, 1994; Snow & Brinton, 1988), this led teachers to guide their students through writing projects where they could explore and apply the discourse of a particular field of study, likely that of their major or a subject in the core curriculum they might be taking alongside their English class. Writing courses that attempted to teach students field-specific discourse were classified as “English for Academic Purposes” or “English for Specific Purposes” (Mohan, 1986) where students were taught not just the special language and accepted rhetorical forms of academic discourse but were typically mentored through the multi-stage process of crafting essays, thus reflecting, as well, a turn from product and grammar-oriented instruction which had previously characterized ESL courses in the preceding decades to one that emphasized the writing process and the language practices used in particular discourse communities.

Citing the work of compositionist Patricia Bizzell, Ruth Spack (1988) acknowledged the importance of seeing the work of the writing teacher as initiating students into academic discourse and, thus, endorsed the shift from elevating product or process above the discursive skills necessary for success in ensuing courses in their majors:

Though a misleading product/process, or process-centered/content based, dichotomy has characterized the debate, ESL writing researchers and teachers have generally agreed that the goal of college-level L2 writing programs is to prepare students to become better academic writers (p. 29).

Horowitz (1986), as well, thought ESL instructors needed to be cognizant of their role in preparing students to write well in the disciplines they would study beyond their core classes, which would mean assigning them writing processes and tasks that would be useful in their major areas of study rather than emphasizing personal or even broadly persuasive essays. However, Spack cautioned teachers to be cognizant of the limitations of their own knowledge and training when doing so, since they could not possibly familiarize themselves or their students with the various discourses that comprise academic knowledge-making in the range of fields studied in universities. Rather, she posited that the teaching of a general model based on basic principles of inquiry and style that are at the root of writing in any subject area.

Spack later published a study (1997) of ESL students making this transition. Through a qualitative analysis of interviews, observations and writing samples collected over three years, she determined that, regardless of the degree of English study done before a student came to the United States, proficiency with academic discourse was just one of the transitions with which ESL students struggled as they adjusted to American life and language since the students were also attempting to fit in socially and culturally. Thus, she saw the writing classroom as a location uniquely suited for collisions of language *and* culture. Similar to the work of theorists in composition studies at the time, Roni Natov (2001) used Mary Louise Pratt's terminology in describing his

own multicultural/contact zone pedagogy for urban classrooms where students read, discuss and write about culture, embracing “ambiguity [...] without closure.” They are not seeking academic certainty in their writing but a range of expression and interpretation, the more realistic “partial comprehension” we should expect from student writers.

As college writing classrooms became increasingly mixed rather than populated strictly by native *or* non-native speakers, researchers wondered if the conventional wisdom undergirding composition teaching for decades (if not centuries) needed reconsideration. Just as in basic writing scholarship of the time, the discussion in ESL venues turned to individual student identity, the linguistic and ethnic diversity in writing classes and the development of pedagogies addressing more nuanced definitions of what it means to be a non-native learner in the twenty-first century classroom. The pedagogical implications of classroom plurality also led to consideration of the diversity ESL student learning styles. In her classes, Joy Reid (1998) had students who appeared to be either “eye learners” or “ear learners,” with the former benefiting most from text-based study of language rules and structures and the latter progressing more quickly through the aid of target language immersion via conversation and media immersion (TV and movies). Clearly, teaching writing as if all ESL students acquired language proficiency through similar means could prove ineffective in reaching students with varying learning styles.

Writing researchers (Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Chiang & Schmida, 1999) suggested that all students have multilayered language backgrounds since many of them have learned some English in their home countries and in extra-academic

contexts (socially, through interaction with various media...), thereby rendering labels assigned them in American universities (ESL, non-native) as inaccurate, marginalizing them as linguistic minority students despite having abilities that might place them closer to native than non-native status. Valdes (1992) noted that students in any college writing class (native speaker, ESL or mixed) could be categorized in more ways than just native or non-native speakers, as writing classes enrolled basic, bilingual and dialect writers, with none at exactly the same stage of English proficiency. Harklau (2000) faulted ESL texts as suggesting international students are a “normative population,” not diverse in language background and objectives” (“Linguistically Diverse” 2).

With students bringing such a range of languages and discourse practices to the classroom, the very notion of teaching a mono-cultural, Standard English came into question. Bruce Horner and John Trimbur (2002) argued for a multilingual rather than monolingual language policy in composition, critiquing the emergence of “English only” legislation in the United States as a hostile response to immigration and case of xenophobia. Horner and Trimbur noted that basic writers (ESL or otherwise) had always been considered immigrants, foreign to academia and, thus, a potential threat to its elite credibility. They even suggested that the term “immigrant” is an unstable label since students are all “in process” no two in the exact moment/stage of the inevitable assimilation that occurs when one transports to another culture.

Horner and Trimbur cited Chiang and Schmida’s (1999) study at UC Berkley where they observed how Asian-American students often describe themselves as in between, not fully of one culture or the other: “categories like ESL, bilingual [...] are

inadequate” in that they don’t accurately describe the ways the students move between multiple literacies in their everyday life; their language use was, therefore, “multilayered,” built through learning and communicating in English before and after arriving in the United States (p. 94). Thus, the labels assigned to such students (native, non-native, bilingual...) were not wholly accurate and put students outside the mainstream of a university mostly focused on-- aside from the odd ESL class— providing an education for native speakers of English.

Chiang and Schmida worried that ESL students were often marginalized by their insider/outsider status in composition classes where they learned alongside native speakers. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, theorists (Belcher & Brain, 1995; Vandrick, 1995; Belcher, 1997; Bensch, 2001) would see this apparent marginalization as more of an opportunity than hurdle for ESL students, granting them the potential, through their reading and writing, to critique the very structures that have positioned them in special courses on the periphery of the university. Similar to Lu’s (1992) reconsideration of basic writers as privileged by their marginal/outsider status, these authors sought ways to integrate ESL pedagogy with critical theory in a manner that would illuminate not just the political realities facing the students but also as a means for introducing them to serious academic inquiry.

Citing Paulo Freire’s (1970) liberatory pedagogy, Belcher & Braine (1995) illuminated the ways in which the teaching of academic writing was value laden and exclusionary and therefore open to critical assessment by the very students the academy places at the margins. Those who embraced this view wrote about an ESL curriculum which began to include assignments where students read and analyzed

professional academic discourse for inherent racial, gender and/or socioeconomic bias (Vanderick, 1995; Belcher, 1997; Benesch, 2001). Just as basic writing scholars were incorporating critical theory and pedagogy (Lu, 1992; Harris, 1995; Cochran, 1994) by raising the issue of social and political exclusion through the strictures of remedial course placement and curriculum features, ESL faculty saw an opportunity to introduce students to provocative critical stances in their writing, not just to liberate them from their linguistic and cultural borderline status in the university but to provide them some of the sophisticated ways of knowing so valued by the academy.

### **The Implications of Classroom Diversity**

The preceding sketch of ESL theory and pedagogy over the past half-century touches upon some of the recurring themes in the literature using the convenient, linear frame of chronology. However, my intention is not to suggest that any period of time described is characterized solely by one approach to teaching writing to non-native speakers. In fact, the current-traditional or product-based model, decades after being embraced (and critiqued), is still more than likely embedded in the ESL curriculum at many institutions and in basic writing courses for native speakers, as evidenced by the continuing proliferation of genre-based readers and skills workbooks being marketed by the field's biggest publishers. No, this outline of ESL theory just sought to lay out some of consistent themes and methods described in the literature over the past several decades, revealing some intersections between composition and ESL theory.

In the most literal sense, the overlapping of first and second language writing theory and practice can be seen most vividly in the student diversity represented in



almost any college writing class in universities which, like State U., enroll tens of thousands of students. Of course, there has been debate among ESL theorists about whether mixed (native and non-native) or homogenous classes are better for second language learners. Those who have advocated for mixed classes cite a range of benefits, from the ESL students' ongoing emersion in the target language through class-related social interactions with native speakers to the realism that a mixed class provides as a representation of the contexts in which they will continue to learn in college and work in the future. Those who have been skeptical of the appropriateness of mixing native and non-native speakers in first-year writing classes suggest that doing so could add to the already significant discomfort and embarrassment of ESL students who might feel reticent among or intimidated by native speakers. Of course, as time progressed, ESL instructors and scholars have had to learn to accept the mixing of L1 and L2 students since many ESL students, for better or worse, choose to take courses with non-native speakers or institutions offer few designated ESL sections, thereby pushing most second language learners into the sections populated by native speakers.

One of the first appeals for the benefits of mixed classes was made by Alice Myers Roy's (1984) who called for "alliance for literacy" course placement policies mixing L1 and L2 learners in order to provide the latter increased exposure to the target language. In fact, she didn't believe these cohorts (native and non-native speakers) differed significantly in their English use, as many native speakers face similar challenges caused by dialect interference with the result being, in terms of usage, writing that features weaknesses seen in ESL compositions as well (missing endings and so-forth). Roy argued that this would benefit not only the ESL students through

increased target language immersion, but it would give native speakers the added experience, through group work, to practice their developing linguistic repertoire in service to their non-native classmates as peer reviewers.

Gere and Abbot (1985) also saw the advantages of enrolling native and non-native students in the same course sections and having them break into groups to work on assignments. Their study revealed how the ensuing conversations presented students the opportunity to internalize language that could later be externalized inside and outside the classroom as they practiced the features they observed in their classmates' writing during peer review. Decades later, Roni Natov (2001) suggested that mixed writing classes did not just expose students to greater cultural diversity than they might otherwise experience in their early college coursework, but that it might provide them the essential recognition of and appreciation for age and class difference:

They, with their working-class culturally diverse perspectives, came endowed with a variety of gifts—the wisdom of the older students who had lifelong tales to tell, the vitality of the younger students, who were perhaps less introspective but grappling with survival skills that revealed new insights about themselves, about our society (188).

Reflecting the contact zone possibilities celebrated by basic writing scholars, Natov saw the mixed (L1 and L2) writing course as something greater than a venue for diverse and enriching literate interactions, but also as a stage for experiential maturation with students learning more about the various cultures and backgrounds of their classmates.

Some authors have been more circumspect when it comes to mixing L1 and L2 students. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) worried about the potential discomforts L1

(resentment) and L2 (embarrassment) feel when put together in classes. In their classes, they saw native speakers showing a degree of hostility and impatience to their non-native counterparts, who they thought belonged in a more basic class that emphasized speech as well as writing since they were often frustrated in their struggle to understand their foreign-born peers. Understandably, the second language students were often reticent about volunteering input in class for fear of embarrassment for mispronouncing words in this new language. Harklau (1994), also wary of mixing L1 and L2 students, characterized these behaviors as intimidation and imposed self-muting. However, despite the challenges mixed classes might impose on teachers, the reality is that classrooms will become increasingly ethnically heterogeneous, so how can faculty develop pedagogies that make the best use of classroom diversity? Historically, one response has been incorporating more collaborative learning opportunities.

### **Collaborative Learning and Mixed Writing Groups**

Like basic writing itself, modern interest in collaborative pedagogy grew out of the influx of nontraditional students in the 1970s, following the establishment of open-admission policies at institutions of higher learning (Howard, Stewart). “For American college teachers, the roots of collaborative learning lie neither in radical politics nor in research.” Rather it was based primarily on “a pressing educational need” (quoted in Clark 15). Building on the emergence of social constructivist theory, educators advocated for collaborative learning strategies in first-year writing courses as a means to decentralize classroom authority and help students build the team-working skills expected of them in the professional careers to which they aspired. And, in the context

of open admissions and ESL instruction, collaborative learning became a means for students to assist one another interdependently, giving the instructor the opportunity to observe the learning process while facilitating a class less reliant on lecture and more dedicated to shared skill development.

Regardless of its origin, it is likely the rare first-year English course that doesn't employ, in some way, collaborative learning, whether in the form of peer review or discussions of readings. For my study, as will be described in greater detail in the next chapter, students worked together during the invention stage seeking the dialogical collaboration Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford characterized as that which requires "divergent perspectives be brought together" leading to "a union that is greater than the parts that composed" (p. 133-34; Hughes & Lund, p. 49). However, where the benefit of such activity is often measured by the quality of the output, I looked at how collaborative learning might as some have theorized (Slavin & Oickle, 1981; Kagan, 1985), promote learner-to-learner tutoring, increase tolerance, decrease prejudice, and promote cross-cultural understanding.

In considering the particular benefits of collaborative learning in increasingly diverse writing classrooms, Bruffee (1998), emphasized what the students bring to the class, not what they don't (presumably error-free writing), concluding that teachers should, as well, see themselves differently, not as correctors of non-standard usage, but the much harder yet rewarding (for students) task of enculturating them, providing them, through new academic rhetorics, access to communities of thought and work that they, otherwise, would not enter, due to the types of informal or culturally idiosyncratic language use to which they had grown accustomed:

Our students [...] did not come to us as blank slates. They arrived in our classes already deeply acculturated, already full-fledged, competent members (as we were, too) of some community or other. In fact, they were already members of several interrelated communities (65).

Bruffee cited Paulo Freire's (1970) and Kurt Lewin's (1946) theorizing of a more liberatory approach to learning when he called for a collaborative "pedagogy of cultural change" (67), one that develops from the teachers' recognition that their own approaches must be changed through experimentation and openness to what their students are bringing to the classroom and how that should inform the ways they are guided through the process of learning.

The collaborative agenda Bruffee advocated is not unlike transition groups, such as those forged by people struggling with addiction or other forms of recovery, the type of collaborative discussion and mutual uplift that moves individuals with common goals through interdependence to independence, with the hope of reintegrating them into a richer, more successful life. In doing so, Bruffee stressed "conversation" as essential component of (collaborative) learning, citing a medical school study from the 50s that showed how "students who learned diagnosis collaboratively acquired better medical judgment faster than individuals who worked alone" (73). This was famously observed by Uri Treisman (1992) who studied math students at Berkley and saw how Asian students conversed about their work outside of class often whereas students from other ethnic groups did not.

Treisman's work with diverse student populations led him to conclude that conversation (or the lack thereof) is often the difference between academic success and

failure, regardless of one's cultural background. So when he introduced it to his classroom, he saw immediate results, with students from certain racial minorities performing better than before. If Bruffee is right when he claims that "the first [step] to learning to think better [is] learning to converse better," then collaborative learning groups forge communities where peers, or as Bruffee calls them, "status equals," talk their way to greater insight and shared success in developing their critical literacy skills. (p. 421). And as Treisman's study revealed, the teamwork must occur outside of the classroom as well since it was there that he observed the difference between the more and less successful students in his math course with the ones who worked together outside of class displaying stronger skills in class.

Actual studies of the efficacy of collaborative learning activities in mixed L1/L2 college writing classes are few and although some of the theory presented in the various journals dedicated to college writing (*CCC*, *College English*, *Journal of Basic Writing* and others) occasionally offer anecdotal illustrations of its efficacy, empirical research on this topic is especially limited in the context of basic writing. Nevertheless, the findings of the few published studies of mixed native/non-native writing courses are valuable, particularly as resources for pedagogical applications and starting points for further research. It is worth noting that collaborative learning in such contexts often takes the form of peer review where students share their written work and provide feedback to one-another with the guidance of their instructor. These studies are useful in sharing the benefits and shortcomings of peer review, depending on how it is approached in terms of planning and expectations.

Though encouraged by some aspects of peer review in his mixed writing classes, Zhu (2001) saw limited interaction from his ESL students when put in peer response groups with native speakers. Though he saw all students engaging in broad-based content feedback, the ESL students were often more taciturn, even allowing NES group mates to talk over them on the rare occasion when they did provide oral responses. Zhu did note, however, that ESL students did provide as much written feedback as their native counterparts, suggesting that mixed group peer review might be enhanced by the addition of written commentary. The results for Bryan (1996) were mixed as well, as she noted similar communication problems with her students which were corroborated when she interviewed them:

Many students stated, generally, the [L1] students did not help them or even speak to them in class and that the teacher did little to encourage communication. During peer review of papers in groups, these [L2] students felt that the students were impatient with them, and one student said that he overheard a student complain to the teacher about her inability to correct the numerous grammatical errors in the [L2] student's paper. (p. 98).

Clearly any writing teacher can envision situations such as this one. In fact, I have seen this phenomenon of resentment and embarrassment play out not just when students work together but when L1 students realize they must take the COMPASS exit exam whereas no L2 students have this requirement *and* are permitted extended time for in-class essay writing—both policies required by the state board governing developmental studies programs though being told this does little to ameliorate the L1 students' sense of unfairness. Nevertheless, Bryan's study reveals how an iterative approach to

curriculum development can solve some of the difficulties encountered when attempting collaborative learning in mixed classes. To counter problems she observed during peer review, such as underprepared or reticent group members, Bryan introduced team-building exercises, group facilitator scripts, and seating assignments to ensure maximum eye contact. Ultimately unsatisfied with persisting limited student engagement, Bryan modified her approach to peer review in the next semester by having students prepare for group work with role-playing exercises and providing them explicit written instructions for working in writing groups, thereby taking away the stress of groups needing to develop their own discussion protocols and action steps.

Patricia Waccholz (1997), who looked at the spoken and written comments given by students during peer review, saw, as well, the difficulties mixed writing groups encounter due to language barriers. Her ESL students, often hampered by lexical challenges and, frequently needing dictionaries to express themselves to peers, offered little to no feedback during collaborative peer review activities. During interviews these students complained that the American students read their drafts or responded to their peers too quickly to be understood. When students offered feedback, it was often structure-based, not focusing on content, with the American students seeking the latter and ESL students, not surprisingly, the former. Thus, the goals of each group were at odds with both coming away unsatisfied with the endeavor. As a result of seeing the same difficulties encountered during mixed group work, Weiland (2002) described how she jettisoned mixed peer review, noting how “it didn’t take [...] long to learn that workshopping wouldn’t work in a classroom where the varieties of English, complete



with all their different and dialectal styles and accents made it a struggle for students to understand each other's words" (p. 281).

I too have observed American students reading quickly past whole paragraphs of errors, losing patience quickly and hoping to get back to their stronger draft for easier revision. The international student, as described by Wacholz, nods politely but remains frustrated, the session being unproductive and leading to a meeting with the instructor during office hours. Wacholz's observation that American students, though interested in criticism of their essay content, rarely offered any of the like to their ESL counterparts may have, as well, been a result of their favoring politeness over in-depth criticism of peer work. Nevertheless, on the rare occasions when essay content was discussed at length, Wacholz saw the groups' energy level and overall participation increase, suggesting students were more confident talking about their topics than rules of grammar or usage—again, an argument for process rather than product-oriented collaborative work, something of which I would take head in developing the paired and group activities for my classes, where students would primarily work together on building rather than revising essays.

Speck (2002), though supportive of collaborative pedagogies in mixed writing classes, cautions teachers to develop group assignments in full awareness of the affective barriers to learning that collaborative writing can invite, such as fear and interpersonal conflict. Whether the issue is ensuring each group is constituted by students with varying skill levels or setting the stage for respectful discussion and feedback, Speck gives real, on-the-ground insight useful for teachers interested in adding group writing to their composition teaching. His emphasis on requiring written

products from all participants is unique in the literature and counters the assumption that group writing is just the individual writing of the strongest group member(s) with minimal input from the rest. Of course, no assignment guarantees equal participation of group members whether in the writing courses or other content areas.

Of course, collaborative learning doesn't just mean students working in groups of three or more students. Aghbar and Alam (1992) researched dyadic writing pairs in an ESOL college writing class. Although native speakers were not represented in the class, the instructor paired students with differing language backgrounds and observed them as they engaged with the composing process with two assignments: the first essay project in the course and the final one. In the video tapes and written data (all essay drafts with including peer comments) collected from these activities, Aghbar and Alam saw a progression from terse and overly positive peer feedback to more critical and, therefore, valuable input reflecting an increase in editorial sophistication over the period studied, as well as greater comfort with offering critical feedback without fear of alienating their peers.

Dreyer (1990) observed student dyads then evaluated his audio recordings of their highly structured paired interactions where students read essay drafts aloud twice while a peer took notes which were read back to the speaker after the second reading. Then the readers switched roles. Dreyer saw this strategy is essential in offering non-native speakers a "rich bath" of language as they and the native speakers get the unique and substantial opportunity to enhance their spoken and written communication skills through dyadic, read-aloud exchanges. Like Bruffee (1998) suggested, conversation is the key to productive collaboration, so the literate conversations Dreyer

required of his students should not be seen just for their potential for writing improvement but as peer development of socio-critical abilities with added benefits if the pairs are heterogeneous in terms of gender or ethnicity. Indeed, pairs might be even more effective than groups in getting peers to interact more productively. Dreyer's "rich bath" achieved through reading aloud or Bryan's highly scripted peer sessions certainly show promise in addressing some of the difficulties L1 and L2 writing teachers face each term: hesitation to see the value of reading aloud and the difficulty keeping groups on task, avoiding the inevitable digressions that come with loosely constructed group assignments.

The preceding descriptions of collaborative learning practices and studies affirm the creativity and usefulness of paired and group learning in the writing classroom, particularly in cases where the students come from such a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. And although basic writing and ESL pedagogical theory certainly informs my course construction, it was the research into collaborative and intercultural teaching and learning that most significantly informed the manner in which I designed (and redesigned) the pedagogy I used for the study described in the following chapters.

### **Postscript: Change and Growth**

It should be noted that just as was seen in the discussion of basic writing history, the work of certain key figures (Matsuda, Silva, Spack and others) was prominent throughout the period through their ongoing scholarly output as historians, pedagogues and/or researchers. And just as certain scholars associated with the basic writing movement (Elbow, Rose, Bartholomae, Bizzell, and Harris) changed their views and

theoretical allegiances over their careers, ESL theorists have done so as well. I point this out, not to criticize any perceived inconsistency in their work but to underscore the evolving nature of academic work, not just as described in any field's history, but in the individual lives of those willing to honestly engage in theoretical and curricular discussions.

This dissertation research was triggered by my own desire for transformation as a teacher and scholar, so to determine how best to undertake this process of pedagogical change and professional growth I developed, based on my review of the literature, what I hoped to be a course that would synthesize aspects of my teaching that I have already found to be effective along with some of the transitional and collaborative pedagogies described in the basic writing and ESL literature discussed in Chapter 2. The themes of pedagogical reconsideration and change emerge from the literature review not as a result of any intentional or discriminating selection of publications from the period studied but as something inevitable, inherent to any historical discussion of teaching, particularly the teaching of a skill which, through ongoing reconsideration and refinement, seeks a continuously modified and, hopefully, improved approach to student thought and practice.

In describing the methodology and findings, the following chapters lay out not only the specific modes of data collection and analysis used but also the pedagogy I develop, for when one speaks of classroom-based action research, alongside the cadre of qualitative measures described should be an equally detailed portrait of the teaching methods employed since they amount to a great portion of the action taken in the study.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The potential benefits claimed for teacher research are diverse: an enriched professionalism, increased confidence in instructional decision-making, a defense against burn-out (Belanger, 1992, p. 18).

This chapter presents the study's core methodological basis, action research, describing the study context, participants, course structure, setting, and limitations as well as the means of data collection and analysis employed. A small distinction will be made between the methodologies inherent to action research in the field of Education and those belonging to teacher research in Composition Studies, as both place the teacher in the role of researcher, and both are characterized by the employment of qualitative research methods such as, observation, reflection, the collecting of artifacts, and in-depth interviewing of participants.

#### **Action Research**

Action Research emerged in the 1930s as researchers in the social sciences sought to build a more naturalistic than scientific framework for studying organizational behaviors (Mills, 2007). Psychologist Kurt Lewin (1946) first described action research in the terms most associated with its current practice: "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (p. 35). The primary goal of action research is to effect change, whether it is used in public or private enterprise to improve working conditions, work products and services, or in educational settings, where action research is performed to better understand what

is happening in a school system, school, or classroom, to determine what might improve things in that context (Sagor, 1992). The major forms of action research are Chris Argyris' "Action Science," John Heron and Peter Reason's "Cooperative Inquiry," William Torbert's "Developmental Action Inquiry," Jack Whitehead's and Jean McNiff's "Living Theory," and Paulo Freire's "Participatory Action Research" (Huang, 2010).

Chris Argyris's "Action Science" developed out of his work with Donald Schon (1978) where they theorized a "double-loop" approach to organizational problem solving. Where some cases of institutional disruption are solved by a "single-loop" approach where an already established rule or policy can be applied, other circumstances warrant the addition of (or revision of) policies to address the situation most effectively. In order to arrive at such conclusions, Argyris's Action Science involves the study of how, when faced with difficulties, people enact responses derived from certain environment variables which often predicate their actions. When these responses are ineffective, an Action Science approach seeks to reconsider the nature of the predicating environmental factors in order to effect alternative actions (Argyris, 1994). In an academic setting this might take the form of research concerning how administrators deal with crises in their schools in order to determine the foundational influences determining their responses and whether personnel might be better equipped to handle difficult situations by drawing on a different set of principles or resources to best resolve the problem.

Like most approaches to action research, Action Science is performed collaboratively, where stakeholders work together to uncover the origins of institutional responses protocols and seek alternative bases from which to draw new policies or

actions. A recent application of Action Science can be seen in *Managing Difficult Conversations at Work* (Clark & Myers, 2007) where the authors' action research concluded that essential, though challenging, workplace conversations are best approached in a more personal and reflective ("open-to-learning") mode that encourages actual dialogue rather than one that is overly critical or policy-bound ("closed to learning").

John Heron and Peter Reason's "Cooperative Inquiry" (also called Collaborative Inquiry), typical of most forms of action research, places the researcher inside the context being researched, to explore the various dimensions of learning and dissemination that take place in that location, essentially how knowledge is constructed, and how it is shared. Cooperative inquiry, by definition, is achieved only if a group of practitioners (teachers, managers, administrators) work together in developing, executing, and, if necessary, revising the research planning, delivery, data collection, and analysis used for a particular study. Each Cooperative Inquiry cycle investigates and develops four types of knowledge: propositional (generated through scientific method of hypothesis and testing), practical (learned through attempting something new), experiential (developed as a result of environmental response/external input), and presentational (learned through the rehearsal and refining of how the knowledge is presented) (Heron, 1996).

An oft-cited example of the application of Cooperative Inquiry brought together various players and entities practicing holistic medicine in Great Britain in the 1980s. The goal of the meeting was to start what they hoped to be an ongoing, collaborative dialogue about how spiritual and naturalistic healing was being performed in that part of

world. After these stakeholders shared their visions and practice of holistic care, they determined that that Britain needed a stronger, unified voice in the field of alternative medicine. Through the application of Herron and Reason's Cooper Inquiry model, their efforts led to the formation of the British Holistic Medicine Association (Herron & Reason, 1985).

William Torbert's "Developmental Action Inquiry" (1976) uses simultaneous action and research to help organizations navigate change reflectively and creatively for sustainable "self-transformation." Although the research might take place in a range of settings (schools, small businesses, corporations), since the participants have likely arrived at the site as products of diverse external influences, the impact of the outside world on institutional processes and norms is investigated as well (Torbert, 1991). Torbert's method involves looking at first, second and third person voices at play in any conflict—the individual's, his/her colleagues', and the institutions', as revealed in its history, functioning, organization and policies.

Torbert's Developmental Action Inquiry has been described as contrasting significantly from positivist, scientific inquiry which seeks validity through impersonal research, whereas Developmental Action Inquiry (DAI) involves reflective, personal sharing and learning with the aim of more effective local, site-specific practice (Torbert, 1999). Torbert details how this can be achieved in his report of findings from a consulting role he played for LDR, a leadership resources provider which was struggling to adapt to the new leadership climate in corporate America in the 1990s. By learning the various perspectives on the issue, from entrance level management to executive leadership, Torbert was able to bring the parties together to achieve greater clarity and

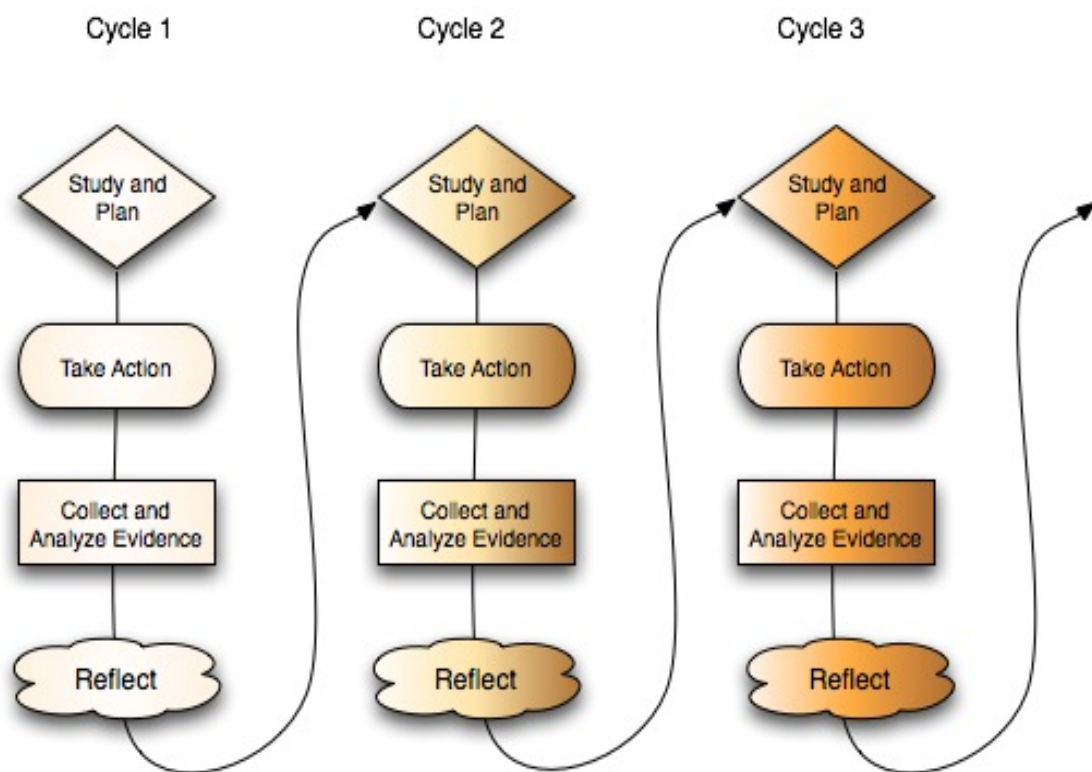


interdependence in their efforts to update their provision of services to better address client needs (McGuire, Palus, & Torbert, 2002).

From a more personal than systemic vantage point, Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff's "Living Theory" requires individuals to consider the influence of their own education backgrounds on their learning before undertaking cyclical action research with the goal of improving their teaching. Each cycle involves not just action but reflection as a means for assessing the impact of each new action undertaken leading, ideally, to greater affirmation (what would be termed corroboration if employing a scientific models of inquiry) and more replicable and sustainable research steps for the benefit of those who plan to undertake it in their own contexts (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). My study reflects the Living Theory action research method, as shown here in Chapter 1, in the narrating of my early teaching experiences and their origins in the broader context of the field of Composition Studies, with the ultimate aim of improving practice through action research. However, in terms of structure and philosophy, my project draws more from the work of Paulo Freire in his Participatory Action Research model.

Participatory Action Research developed out of Paulo Freire's (1970) contention that the banking model of education excludes input from students whose perspectives are essential in understanding the political and practical dynamics which often seek to oppress or enculturate them as passive, uncritical recipients of knowledge. Freire's PAR method of planning, acting and reflecting is used by educational and community-based organizations (worldwide) seeking democratic change in the contexts in which they work. Though my study was not conceived as a means of achieving the political or

social justice Freire sought through projects aimed at democratizing education, I can see a potential link between Freirean action research and my work if it were to be applied in broader institutional (rather than classroom) contexts. I did, nevertheless, follow the PAR method as the framework for my inquiry with the planning stage being my curriculum development and redevelopment (following the first iteration) and the action and reflection taking place through the teaching of the course, data collection and analysis, and adjustments made for the ensuing iterations.



Progressive Problem Solving with Action Research

Figure 1: Action Research Cycles (Riel, 2010)

In all forms, action research begins with identifying a problem, planning an intervention to target that problem, observing its implementation, then collecting and analyzing data before the next, modified, iteration or “step” (Lewin, 1946, p. 35). My action research project followed the PAR method where I have worked as both teacher and researcher in the context of the developmental writing classroom. Often called “situated learning” (Brown et al., 1989), action research seeks not only to assess and improve the experience for students, but also for the instructor who is, through the action research cycle, refining pedagogy in a reflective process of teaching, data collection, and analysis, before starting the process all over again. This concept of learning being a “situated” behavior draws on the work of anthropologists (Lave, 1982; Lave & Wenger, 1991) who have spent decades studying learning in a variety of contexts where they have observed the socially-constructed transformational benefits for both teacher and learner which is highly dependent on the learning situation more so than the content being taught.

Some teachers and administrators might wonder how action research differs from the types of classroom experimentation and modification that occur on a daily basis in classrooms everywhere. Tripp (1990) distinguishes action research from these typical, ongoing curricular reforms and improvements most teachers continuously undertake throughout their careers:

The difference is that action research is conscious and deliberate, a characteristic that leads to “strategic action.” Strategic action involves action based on understanding that results from the rational analysis of research-quality information, in contrast to action that is a result of habit, instinct, opinion or mere

whim, on the one hand, and irrelevant, subjective or incomplete knowledge on the other (p. 159).

In a writing class, this generally implies the introduction of some new pedagogy or curriculum enhancement, and determining, through data collection, repetition, and reflection, the degree of its impact over time, in line with the goals of the implementation. My study introduced cultural course content and assignments requiring students to work in heterogeneous pairs, or groups, while I collected qualitative data: surveys, student and teacher reflections, participant interviews, and course artifacts (syllabi, assignment descriptions, and student work).

Donald Schon (1983) has called action research “knowing in action” since teachers are often the investigators in studies done in classroom settings. Reflective teaching of this sort—with the teacher learning alongside his or her students—authentically captures what happens in classrooms from both the teacher’s and students’ perspectives. Carr and Kemmis (1986) described this process as “emancipatory,” for its valuing the workplace as an essential site for inquiry, thereby granting professional empowerment to teacher/practitioners. I certainly would like to believe that action research studies are valued by the university and its various stakeholders; for me, this project has served as a means (dissertation) for career advancement and growing my research skill set, but in a much more personal sense – the project increased my confidence as an innovative teacher , one who is willing to risk failure in the ongoing effort to improve and remain professionally motivated. By following the action research cycle, I was able to assess my effectiveness in achieving these goals.

## **Teacher Research**

In the field of Composition Studies within English Departments, an action research project would likely fall under the broader category of “teacher research.” For the purposes of my study, little distinction should be made between the two. Where action research can be done by business managers, school administrators, or anyone seeking to achieve widespread or limited institutional change, teacher research is almost always classroom based, but it is carried out, methodologically, like action research in that it employs primarily qualitative methods of data collection and analysis with the goal of achieving improved and more reflective teaching and learning practices. In those ways the two might be seen as relatively indistinguishable.

The Teacher Research movement started in England in the 1960s to get teachers more involved in determining, through classroom-based research, how to address the needs of their students and create improved contexts for learning (Babin & Harrison, 1999). Some of the studies cited in Chapter 2 (Emig, 1971; Britton, 1975; Sommers, 1980) are representative of early teacher research being done with writing students to determine their thought patterns, content generation and organizational habits when composing essays. This work can be seen as a response to Lee Odell’s (1976) challenge to writing teachers to “bring research out of the ivory tower [...] and into the complex reality of the classroom” (p. 111).

The advantages of teacher research are, perhaps, best summarized by Ruth Ray (1992) who saw practitioner, classroom and/or institution-based inquiry as a way of empowering teachers to effect change upward rather than have it administratively mandated to them. Ray stated that the shift in composition studies to teacher-research

based inquiry in the 1980s emerged from dissatisfaction among theorists and practitioners with what they deemed “counterintuitive findings” of mostly quantitative university research done in the field which was applied “inappropriately” (and ineffectively) in the classroom (Ray, 1992, p. 174). Thus, teacher research seeks to illuminate various components of classroom life--depending on the focus of the study—that may not have been rendered as accurately through more quantitative, empirical means. Ray (1993) describes this process as such, “[t]hrough the construction of personal knowledge, teacher researches come to the construction of local knowledge [...] knowledge for the community of teachers within one’s department, school, community, district or state (p. 86). Where action research generally focuses on a pre-identified problem needing resolution, teacher research is more intentionally generative, employing the same, mostly qualitative, methods to better describe how knowledge is created and shared in classroom or school contexts. In teacher research, the idea is not necessarily to change anything but to better describe and understand what is happening in the context being studied.

Because my project started with a classroom observation (student self-segregation and disengagement) made while taking an Action Research course at the time, from inception, the methodology I selected was more action than teacher research, in that I remained focused on the classroom implications of my choices of intervention, reflection and revision. Had this project been guided more by the philosophy and techniques of teacher research, I might have proceeded less intentionally and more generatively, early on, using the same methods of data collection to yield new research questions rather than attempt to answer a few from the outset.

## **Pedagogy as Methodology**

For this project, I constructed an intercultural and collaborative pedagogy which served as the foundational methodology from which I was able to extract several forms of data to be analyzed in order to make adjustments for later iterations. My emphasis on collaborative and intercultural learning borrows from the several of the studies and teaching descriptions reviewed in Chapter 2. Although aspects of nearly all of the studies mentioned can be observed in the implementation of my project, the first two studies I read (Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Ibrahim & Penfold, 2006) clarified, for me, the potential value of conducting the research described in the following chapters, as well as revealing a gap that remained persistent in my review of other studies of mixed writing groups: all occurred in general education writing classes whereas mine would take place in a developmental writing course.

Matsuda and Silva's (1999) frequently cited study of mixed writing groups involved students placed in a freshman composition course for management majors—students working on improving the cross-cultural communication skills necessary for success in their future endeavors in the business community. Although Matsuda and Silva worked with students with a much more concentrated focus (business management) than mine, their first writing project, the Interview Essay, a conversational start to student engagement and writing in their course, influenced my choice for the students' first assignment; however, where their students understandably use the interview process to develop an argument about a topical issue (typical of a college writing course) from one another's culture, my developmental writing students interviewed one another before composing descriptive essays about their partners'

encounters with language difficulties. This approach reflects Marcia Cummins (1995) suggestion that teachers must build on the commonalities these groups share. Thus, in her class, group work begins with first-day interviews conducted by L1/L2 pairs. The classes I studied would begin in the same fashion, with the students interviewing one another as an ice breaker then, later, re-pair for the Interview Essay.

The work of Ibrahim and Penfold (2006), as well, informed my course design. Firm advocates of mixed L1 and L2 teaching and learning, they observed how students enriched their compositions with input from peers. They also provided a clear rationale for these courses: NES and ESL students might often meet in other classes during their academic career, so the mixed composition class constitutes the ideal place to prepare students for such circumstances. Ibrahim and Penfield saw, over a year of observing their students' course work, an overall increase in class participation and less tension than previously encountered by students during topic selection. After reading about the numerous challenges students encountered during mixed peer review groups and pairs, it was encouraging to read Ibrahim and Penfold's study of writing groups working on the early stages of the process rather than just peer review which, as other researchers noted, can be problematic when grouping or pairing L1 and L2 learners (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Harklau, 2000; Zhu, 2001, Weiland, 2002). The second collaborative assignment I selected for my classes draws on the Peter Elbow's (1990) "collage essay," which he had seen as effective way of using small groups not just for peer review but to pool their individual work in developing a group essay. My students, as will be described in the following chapters, attempted similarly team-conceived and written



essays, with the objective of bringing out different points of view on the same subject while assembling an essay that fuses the students' ideas and talents.

### **Pilot Study, Data Collection and Analysis**

My foray into action research started with an assignment for a graduate course I took in 2008. I call that research project the pilot study for my final dissertation research, which I conducted in 2011 since the pilot was my first time incorporating action research into my teaching, and even though some aspects of the study changed over the ensuing years, I always followed the PAR method and remained focused on the themes of collaboration and intercultural attitudes. Herr and Anderson (2005) indicate that "pilot material [is] part of the action research process and the results of these pilots can be part of [...] the dissertation." (71). Indeed, one cannot easily see why pilot data could ever be ignored since it almost assuredly, as it did in my study, propels the research into directions manifested in later iterations.

Since the pilot was just six weeks, I did not feel I had the time to create and implement a pre- intervention survey that would set a quantitative benchmark to compare with post-intervention survey results (a key data feature of later iterations). I did, nonetheless, observe my students' group work during the completion of two projects: a team PowerPoint presentation and collaborative writing assignment. During each in-class group work session, I observed and took notes on a three-column form on which I recorded what I saw during class, followed by some cursory thoughts about each observation; then, I went back some weeks later, or even, in one case, at the end of the term, and filled in further reflective considerations for each item, which were

sometimes informed by my ongoing review of the literature, or the clarity that can come from time away from the phenomenon being observed. It should be noted that I used the same form when collecting data during the later iterations.

Date	See	Think	Reflect
Mar. 2	Group 2 somehow has 3 students from SE Asia who are being passive to the more dominant personalities. In this group, one African-American student who appears to be composing aloud and typing while the others toss out ideas and suggest corrections... ideally.	How did I let this happen? Funny how some of these mistakes are so amateurish. The screw-ups. Easy fix for next time (HETEROgeneous groups).	Speaks to the relevance of knowing student educational backgrounds. I have taught students from the following countries over the past decade: Australia, Belarus, Iceland, India, Kenya... I know SE Asian students are typically more reserved than, say, ones from Latin American. Yet I still did this.

Figure 2: Sample Observation Notes Worksheet

Most evenings, during the pilot and 2011 study, I made entries in a log about any thoughts that would come to mind when I reflected on the day's activities. Though it would be later that I would read about the benefits of journaling as reflective practice (Kantor, 1990; Schon, 1983), I needed some way to think about what I was doing and how I might do it better in the future, recognizing early on that teaching and conducting

research simultaneous granted me little time, during class, to be reflective, or, for that matter, to record copious observation notes.

After each group meeting, I gave the students 2 or 3 questionnaire prompts to which they composed anonymous paragraph-length responses. I did not want them to think that their feedback would be identifiable by me since they might be critical of the performance of classmates. Nevertheless, I tried to keep the questions open-ended so responses could vary and provide richer data than countable pre-determined (multiple choice) responses. This way, along with my observation notes, I would have the students' own words to illustrate to what degree my objectives were accomplished.

The following questions were used (among others) to elicit detailed responses about the group sessions: *Describe each group member's contribution(s) to the process?* and *How was the activity valuable (or not) in terms of how you interacted with the group members?* As these items, in retrospect, could appear to be leading and not open-ended enough (a student might just parrot terms like "valuable" or respond without being specific), I used what I believe to be more effective prompts in the later iterations. I also changed the way I evaluated and, in the final report, presented their feedback, in the later cycles. Where I coded the student reflections composed during the pilot study with a countable plus/minus system, I focused more, in the later iterations, on the common themes expressed in their feedback. These changes will be detailed in Chapter 4 where I fully explain how the pilot study process, data analysis, and findings led to significant modification for the semesters studied in 2011.

### **2011: Context, Participants and Pedagogy**

The final and more complete full semester iterations of this study took place in developmental writing classes at the same large regional university in the Southeast (State U.) in spring and fall of 2011. The research participants were enrolled English 0099/Writing for Academic Purposes, which is required of students who fail to meet the entrance criteria for placement in the general education freshman composition course (English 1101), either through scoring below a minimum passing score on the standardized computer-adaptive COMPASS placement test or, for non-native speakers, the TOEFL, or Michigan Test. Students placed in these classes came from a range of geographical and socio-economic backgrounds, from rural North and South Georgia to suburban metro Atlanta. Many of the students enrolled in the course were international students who had been in the United States anywhere from a month to a few years, so the class population was quite diverse in terms of demography and English proficiency.

The participants in the study were enrolled in two sections of ENGL 0099 offered in Spring and Fall 2011. Each courses section enrolled between 18 and 22 students, for a combined total of 38 participants—22 for whom English was their native language (referred to as L1) and 16 for whom it was not (L2). In a project such as mine, the research and teaching methods are intertwined to a degree that it is essential the instructor recognizes how his/her pedagogical choices and classroom facilitation are geared at the project's research questions (see Figure 3). My research questions were:

- How do paired and group writing activities impact student perceptions of the usefulness of collaborative learning?

- How does enrollment in a culturally-themed writing class emphasizing paired and group learning affect intercultural attitudes?

These research questions were determined through consultation with a colleague who had done a substantial amount of qualitative research in the field of education. She was instrumental in helping me refine and clarify the questions, moving away from my initial desire to measure intercultural communication (a difficult skill to measure short-term) to focusing, rather, on intercultural attitudes.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Related Course Content</b>	<b>Forms of Data</b>
How do paired and group writing activities impact student perceptions of the usefulness of collaborative learning?	Students engage in all stages of writing process (prewriting, writing and revising) in dyads (with a partner); they compose a “college essay” in groups at the end of the term.	Observation Notes Student Reflections (written) Survey results Interview Transcripts Syllabi, Assignment Sheets, Essays
How does enrollment in a culturally-themed writing class emphasizing paired and group learning affect intercultural attitudes?	Reading, writing assignments and several class discussions will focus on common attitudes toward culture.	Observation Notes Student Reflections Survey results Interview Transcripts Syllabi, Assignment Sheets, Essays

Figure 3: Research Questions, Course Content and Data Collection

Each semester began with the students being provided, in the first two class sessions, a general overview of course theme of intercultural learning and how I would be collecting data from voluntary participants throughout the term. At the start of the second week of class, students were extended an invitation to participate in the study by a colleague who reviewed the consent letter with them, solicited participation and would later observe the class and conduct interviews with willing participants. Students who decided to take part in the study completed pre- and post-intervention surveys of their attitudes about mixed classes and collaborative learning. The survey was administered before the first paired learning activity (The Interview Essay) then, months later, following the Collaborative Collage project. In order to ensure the quality of the instrument in eliciting useful feedback in line with my study's goals, I researched surveys on intercultural attitudes and adapted some of the wording ("I am pretty sure of myself...") from Penbeck, et al. (2009), who studied the intercultural communication competence and sensitivity of university management and economics students to determine their readiness for transacting in a global business climate. I had a colleague who specializes in qualitative education research at State U. review the questions and offer critical feedback for revision before survey distribution (see Figure 4).

### **Language, Culture and Learning Survey**

Was English the first language you learned at home as a child? \_\_\_\_\_

**Respond to the following items by indicating which score (1 - 5) best indicates your agreement or disagreement with each statement. *Your responses are strictly anonymous.***

***5 – Strongly agree***

***4 – Agree***

***3 – Neutral***

***2 – Disagree***

***1 – Strongly disagree***

1. When I attend classes with students from other countries I make a special effort to communicate with them beyond what is required by the instructor. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Small group work can help me improve my English skills. \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am pretty sure of myself when interacting with people from different cultures. \_\_\_\_\_
4. I feel unsure of my ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I am patient when talking to people from other cultures. \_\_\_\_\_
6. I prefer classes that don't involve working in groups or pairs. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I often feel anxious when I am with people from different cultures. \_\_\_\_\_
8. I believe classes with students from other countries are beneficial to my learning. \_\_\_\_\_
9. People born in other countries share most of the same values I do. \_\_\_\_\_
10. I believe group assignments are productive learning experiences. \_\_\_\_\_
11. I believe working with a partner on assignments is valuable for learning. \_\_\_\_\_
12. In my future career, I expect I will be working with people from other cultures. \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 4: Pre/Post-Intervention Survey

The students required to take this course at State U., regardless of instructor, are taken through a series of 4 or 5 major writing assignments, including two in-class essays which require them to compose a complete essay from a prepared outlined during one (for native speakers) or two (for non-native speakers) class periods. The

other two essay tasks are determined by the faculty member. For this study, these assignments took the form of one paired and one group project: The Interview Essay and The Collage Essay. For the Interview Essay, after the students read, wrote about and discussed (with the whole class) a common reading, they were placed in heterogeneous pairs: one native speaker with one non-native speaker. In a few cases this was not possible since there was not an even number to fit those classifications; Therefore, I tried to achieve heterogeneity by pairing students indicating differences in dialect or region of the United States (Northeast, Southeast, Industrial Mid-west) from which each came.

Once students were paired, they shared their reading responses to the assigned essay. In the spring semester the reading was Amy Tan's "The Language of Discretion," which explores the author's experiences navigating life bilingually with her home language (Chinese) practices sometimes coming into conflict with that of her adopted language (English). For reasons described in the next chapter, In the second semester, the students responded to one of two readings assigned from the course reader, *One World Many Cultures*: Joe Bageant's "Valley of the Gun," which discusses gun culture through the lens of his upbringing in rural West Virginia, or Patricia Hampl's "Grandmother's Sunday Dinner," where the author recalls going to her Czech grandmother's home for a customary family dinner. The students' three-paragraph responses to either of these readings were shared during the interview phase of the activity (see Figure 5).



**Reading Responses**  
***One World, Many Cultures***

Before the day we will be discussing each selection, compose a 3 paragraph response for each essay you read. So if you read two essays in OWMC, you must bring two 3 paragraph responses to class.

**Paragraph 1** should state, in your own words, what you think are the author's main points and reason for writing the essay.

**Paragraph 2** should describe the parts of the essay you like best, being detailed in your descriptions of those passages.

**Paragraph 3** should discuss how any of your own experiences relate with anything the author mentions.

*You must bring your typed responses to class  
on the assigned date.*

Figure 5: Assignment Sheet for Reading Responses

After the students exchanged and read the reading responses, they came up with a set of questions to ask one another in order to learn more about their partners' experiences and feelings concerning the article's topic. Once the students reviewed each partner's reading response and developed the set of interview questions, they emailed them to their classmate, printed out their partner's replies and brought them to class the next day where they conducted a face-to-face interview in order to acquire more details for the essay which was then drafted, peer reviewed and submitted to me for evaluation. In

essence, each student wrote a third-person narrative/description essay about his or her partner's experience with the topic of the reading assignment, gun culture or family meals.

After the essays were returned by me, the students were given a final opportunity to revise them (after further discussion of the instructor comments with me and their partners). The following class, they resubmitted their revised drafts, which were then assigned a final grade and returned to them. In the weeks that followed, the students prepared for and completed the first in-class essay exam before working in groups of 4 or 5 on the Collage Essay, where they followed the same routine with a common reading assignment (three paragraph reading response) before being placed into heterogeneous groups to plan and co-author a collaborative essay drawn from what they considered the best writing done in the reading responses. In the following chapter, the Interview and Collage Essays will be described in more detail, as they underwent, after the first iteration, some changes based on the findings from the spring 2011 semester.

As the students worked on the Interview and Collage Essays, I observed and took notes, again, using the same three column form I constructed for the pilot study. After each paired and group activity, students responded to open-ended reflection prompts such as, *Describe your feelings about working with your partner and the interview essay assignment itself*, and *Describe your feelings about working as a group on this assignment*. The reflection responses were collected by a student in the class who placed them in an envelope which was then sealed to preserve anonymity as I did

not want students to sense that I could associate any comments with particular authors, thereby increasing the potential for greater candor when composing their responses.

I read and coded the students' feedback after semester grades were submitted. The coding scheme involved me highlighting in blue non-neutral comments about culture and highlighting in yellow non-neutral comments about working in pairs or groups. Such comments used expressions such as "liked," "didn't like," "was helpful," "wasn't helpful" and so forth (specific illustrative comments are provided in Chapter 4). By the final week of each term, I had collected a variety of data for evaluation: Pre and post-surveys, field notes, student reflections and course artifacts including syllabi, assignment sheets and student essays.

At the end of the term, the students completed the post-survey and, once final grades were submitted, I evaluated their assignment reflections and essays. Although I planned to have a colleague interview two students after each term, we were only able to get one volunteer to show up each semester. The interview questions were crafted by me and the colleague, who assisted with the consent process and, like the survey questions, were vetted by a colleague in the Education Department at our university (see Figure 6).

#### **Participant Interview Questions**

1. Which aspects of the course do you feel were most effective in improving your performance? How so?
2. Which activities were the most memorable and why?
3. Do you believe you will stay in touch with any of your classmates

- beyond this semester? Explain why you think this is so.
4. Did your feelings about working in groups change this semester? Why or why not?
  5. Describe your feeling about working with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Please be as descriptive as possible, citing examples from our work this semester. Have these feelings changed?

Figure 6: Interview Questions

The transcripts from the spring and fall interviews were coded using the same highlighting scheme used for the student reflections which, along with the other data collected, informed the modifications I made for the course. Sometimes a needed change was obvious; sometimes it wasn't. Since making superficial changes between iterations would not likely yield the best data, I was intentional about making significant enhancements to the class based on my data analysis. How my course changed and why will be detailed in the following chapter, which discusses findings from each cycle of this study, including the initial six-week pilot. In keeping with the ethnographic principals of teacher research in composition (Bishop, 2001), where feasible, I provide data tables to present textual data in that more visually interpretable manner.

### **Study Validity and Limitations**

The validity of action research is tested by evaluating the impact of action steps in a continuous process of data collection, reflection and analysis, interpretation, action

and evaluation (Altrichter & Posch, 1989). At a later stage it can be further validated through the process of communicating a range of outcomes to other practitioners (either orally or in writing) who will make implicit comparisons with their own repertoire of experience and judge the work to be worthwhile or not. Action research does not seek the degree of certainty or causality suggested by research methodologies used by many social scientists. Being rooted in the qualitative, ethnographic tradition used for decades in the field of anthropology, action research projects place the researcher in a very specific context that is being transformed while the study is taking place. Blichfeldt & Andersen (2006) qualify this unique aspect of action research as follows:

Although most generalizable studies involve causal models, we do not argue that action researchers should seek to develop such models. On the contrary, we argue that causal models are inadequate for description of most human actions due to the presence of an infinite number of highly interdependent factors.

Therefore we suggest that action researchers should look for other types of transferable results that might be taken from specific projects and made available in other situations and settings (8).

Action researchers can achieve a degree of validity that should yield findings useful to others in the profession. It should be noted, however, that some researchers may be circumspect about action research for its site-specific application and lack, therefore, of generalizability, thus differentiating it from empirical research methodologies. Coghlan & Brannick (2005) address this concern by suggesting that knowledge acquired through action research, though primarily aimed at improving one's practice in a very specific context, can also, through dissemination, be seen as transferrable to other sites. Of

course, the burden on the action researcher is not to prove the replicability of his or her efforts but to provide as detailed a description of the work as possible with the audience deciding its usefulness beyond the site studied.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) prefer the term “trustworthiness” when considering the dependability of action research. Following Guba’s criteria for trustworthiness (1981; see Figure 7), I collected data which, when cross-checked with other data forms, could be validated as illustrative of the emergent findings which might be useful to those studying or teaching in similar academic contexts.

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Applied to Study</b>
Prolonged participation at study site minimizes bias and researcher paradox	I conducted the study over one six week pilot and 2 sixteen week semester iterations.
Persistent observations to find pervasive vs. atypical characteristics	I observed classes, recording field notes during and after all class sessions involving group work.
Peer debriefing (done by critical friend or colleague)	A colleague observed my class and provided me with a formal report of her evaluation of the class.
Practice triangulation: cross-check data	By collecting varied forms of data (field notes, surveys, reflections and written) I can triangulate/ cross-check data.

Figure 7: Applying Guba’s Criteria for Trustworthiness

Some say that ethnographic, qualitative studies are inherently limited given their unscientific imprecision. Indeed, any research method has its drawbacks. The observer's paradox, for example, could compromise observational data culled from teacher filed notes, rendering it a mere snapshot seen through the researcher's unavoidably biased perspective. I fully recognize my own bias in this research, particularly in my hope that choices I made in constructing the pedagogy would ultimately benefit the students. However, where possible, I attempted to remain dispassionate in my collection and analysis of data, using the assistance of colleagues during most aspects of the research process (soliciting participation and consent, creating survey and reflection instruments and so forth) to put some distance between myself and the data.

Action research, in being performed while teaching, can be unpredictable, even overwhelming due to the challenges of balancing the roles of teacher and researcher. Indeed, action research can be, as McNiff (1988) terms it, a "messy process," since the participants and researcher are involved in a teaching and learning process that is constantly affected by the variable nature of life events in and out of the classroom. However, action research is said to be especially suited to studies attempting to change processes in social contexts because it anticipates the highly contingent and context-dependent nature of such change processes (Guba, 1981). This makes it necessary to argue not just for one's findings in a study but also for the manner in which they were determined and presented.

To reiterate, this study does not argue for the transferability of its findings in similar contexts. Being action research, this work only seeks to adequately describe what occurred and how, in cyclical fashion, the course evolved, pedagogically, in ways informed by the previous semester's data. Nevertheless, the chief limitation of my study is the small N number. With only an average of 19 participants each term and a total of 38 for the entire study, one might conclude that there just isn't enough data to support even the most contingent generalizations. It is my hope that the ensuing analysis demonstrates the usefulness of action research in describing a developing collaborative and intercultural pedagogy and its impact on the students and teacher.

Another limitation is the problem of labeling a participant's language history as ESL when English may have been his or her third or fourth language, and local variations in dialect cannot be excluded when characterizing how a student's spoken and written language differs from Standard English. I fully recognize that in calling all students L2 whose home language was not English, I risk simplifying the much broader diversity represented in these classes. Indeed, the literature often challenges the accuracy of those who categorize writing students as exclusively L1 or L2 since one non-native speaker may have been in the States for a decade whereas another for merely weeks (Severino et al., 1997; Harklau et al., 1999). Even from household to household the degree to which a second language is used can vary, giving one "L2" student greater exposure to the target language than another, which would more than likely impact how his or her writing ability is displayed in class. It is hoped, since this study's focus is, primarily, shifts in attitude, that the L1/L2 coding scheme is not



obscuring or prohibitive in the collection and analysis of rich, valuable data from the study.

When considering the limitations of a qualitative research project such as mine, confidentiality, due to the interactive nature of some of the data collection (in-class distribution of reflection prompts, in-depth interviewing), might be brought into question by some readers of the study. Some might even suggest that maintaining total anonymity and confidentiality of the results of action research is impossible since the researcher is performing dual roles as teacher and data collector. This is especially challenging in the Internet era when the audience for the research can perform a simple web search to determine where the author teaches, even which classes were likely studied (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007). Nevertheless, for this study, it may appear that the degree to which I maintain the participants' anonymity depersonalizes the data, thereby limiting the descriptive potential of the research in ways that the inclusion of a case study or more specific student characterizations (than L1 or L2) may not. It must be clarified that I chose this more distanced vantage point because of what I perceived to be constraints placed on the research by the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) at the institutions where I developed and carried out the study. Otherwise, I might have felt freer to personalize some of the results described in the following chapter.

Of course, since all researchers, not just action researchers, likely provide, during dissemination, telltale aspects of the locations and participants researched, the burden of complete anonymity is likely insurmountable and thus relies on the good will of the audience, who should be duty-bound to focus on the quality and applicability of the research rather than the personal identities of the people and places studied. I am

hopeful that the data findings expressed in the following chapter (and during any future dissemination of this research) are met with a professional commitment to preserve the anonymity of the generous participants whose work (and mine) might inform a better understanding of how action research may contribute to more effective collaborative learning and improved intercultural attitudes among developmental writing students.

## 4 STUDY FINDINGS

In this tradition of reflective teaching, the teacher's attention is focused both inwardly at his or her own practice, and outwardly at the social conditions in which these practices are situated (Zeichner & Liston, 1996, p. 59).

Although this study was initially conceived in 2008 when I was taking an Action Research course, that early pilot study, which captured just six weeks of teaching and learning in a developmental writing class, will be shown, in this chapter, to have been instrumental in providing a foundation for my preparations for the 2011 semesters in which I continued the study. As such, I was able to use the data culled from the pilot effort in planning the teaching, data collection and data analysis for the spring 2011 semester. With both the pilot and later cycles I follow composition teacher researcher and ethnographer Wendy Bishop's (1999) advice for presenting findings by displaying survey data in table form, focusing only on key items that are corroborative through triangulation, categorizing written comments from student reflections and observer notes, and coding interview transcripts for emergent themes.

### **From Pilot to Dissertation Study**

In October 2008, the pilot cohort of 16 English 0099 students (one course section) engaged in two group projects, the first requiring them to collaborate on a comparison/contrast PowerPoint presentation. I split the students into groups of four, with at least one of each gender represented, and at least one international student in each group. While they worked, I recorded observation notes and, later, evaluated their

written reflections on the group meetings. My research questions for the pilot study were as follows:

- How can heterogeneous writing groups promote productive collaboration in a college writing class?
- How can group work lead to meaningful cross-cultural communication?

It should be noted that, for reasons to be describe later in this chapter, the research questions were slightly modified for the later iterations.

On the first day that the groups formed and met, it seemed from my observation that two groups were having trouble pinning down a time they could meet between Wednesday and Monday classes. I recorded in my observation log the comment, “Groups 2 and 3 are really hesitant in their interacting compared with the other groups. Is it shyness? Waiting for a leader to step forward?” I was surprised since they had worked together previously in class in pairs or small groups and certainly knew each other as well as the students in the other groups knew one another (at least from my observation). They should have been able to easily find a time over the course of almost five days that would be convenient for all of them, particularly since they could meet electronically (phone or Internet). Perhaps this was just a stage in the process of group formation since two of the four groups were exhibiting this reserve. When the students came back to class Monday, having met outside of class once, I had them respond to the following questions anonymously on their own papers:

- How did your meeting go in terms of attendance and communication?
- Do you feel you know your partners better now?

After collecting their replies, I marked responses with a plus, minus or check, indicating the degree to which the student responded positively or negatively to the prompt. If a student used terms such as “very well,” “good” or any other affirming descriptor, I gave the comment a plus. Anything contrary (“wasn’t helpful,” “didn’t get to know”) was given a minus and comments that were neutral got a check (see Figure 8).

<p><b>Comments receiving a <u>plus</u>:</b></p> <p>Group session went very well. We communicated on the phone and came up with a good topic for our [presentation].</p> <p>We met at different times due to everyone’s schedules. [L1 student] and I had a wonderful meeting.</p>
<p><b>Comments receiving a <u>check</u>:</b></p> <p>It went well. We have a couple of topics to write about in mind. I feel we should have a good paper.</p> <p>I actually communicated over the phone and email; however, we will be meeting as a whole this week.</p>
<p><b>Comments receiving a <u>minus</u>:</b></p> <p>We had a very, very short and brief meeting. We were supposed to meet online but it was difficult so I only got the chance to talk to one person in my group.</p> <p>I feel like I do not know my partners much better since we all didn’t talk much.</p>

Figure 8: Sample responses from student reflections following first meeting

Since my initial plan was to require them to meet in person outside of class, I am glad that I allowed the option for meeting by phone or email, as several comments addressed the benefits of that flexibility. After marking each of the students' responses with a plus, check or minus, I counted the number of statements that fell into each category to better determine their enthusiasm for what was accomplished in that first group session. As the table below indicates about half of the students gave favorable responses to the first set of questions.

Table 2: Student Responses to First Group Session

Question	Minus	Check	Plus	% Plus/ Check
How did your meeting go in terms of attendance and communication?	9	6	1	<b>44</b>
Do you feel you know your partners better now?	8	7	1	<b>50</b>

From the aggregate student response figures and illustrative comments, the progress made by the groups, in terms of communicating and getting to know each other, was minimal, perhaps best indicated by the number of responses receiving minuses. I was, however, hopeful that once the students had more specific work-oriented tasks, they would interact more positively and productively.

During the second in-class session, the groups worked on the slides for the presentations, and their last meeting (out-of-class) saw them putting the finishing touches on and practicing their presentations. I noted that some students were now

more clearly the group leaders, as the discussion was generally facilitated by one member and an apparent co-leader who, interestingly enough, turned out to be, in each group, someone of the other gender (than the leader's), perhaps a tacit acknowledgement of the need for gender balance in each group. In rereading the responses to those first prompts, I wondered if the students who appeared to take the lead in each group were also the ones who, through their reflections, appeared to initiate (electronic) communication between the first and second class sessions.

One observation I recorded during the in-class session before their presentations noted how much smoother they seemed to be working, with the group leader no longer interacting with each group member but doing his or her part while the others did theirs (each working on a PowerPoint slide): "Great to see the groups working so well. Everyone seems to know his/her role. No hesitation." When the students came back to class the next day to do their presentations, I recorded the additional observation: "In every case, the presentations were well-done. Some students appeared a bit detached while one talked through the slides. I wonder what their comments will reveal. Did some members work harder than others?" This question would be answered when I collected then read the students' responses to the final set of reflection prompts:

- How did the final group session go? Be specific.
- Describe each group member's contribution to the process.
- How was the activity valuable (or not) in terms of how you interacted with the group members?

I used the same plus/minus system for marking responses based on the presence or absence of affirmative or native expressions, such as “great,” “very well,” “enjoyed,” “disappointed,” and “frustrated.”

**Comments receiving a plus:**

It was a great activity to get to [work with] someone else in class. It also was helpful for team work skills and building a closer class.

The value of the activity was great. I got to know and interact with my teammates better, especially [student name] and with that I believe I will value him as my first American friend.

**Comments receiving a check:**

This is my first group [project]. I think after all everything goes well. Even though we don't spent a lot of time for this, but we find a good topic.

We did not really meet in person but we kept contact by email. I think that keeping contact by email did work but it would have been more helpful if we had met in person.

**Comments receiving a minus:**

The last group session? We didn't have one. So I emailed all of the slides to each person. {Student name} and I talked last night by phone and decide[d] how to handle today seeing that neither of the other two members of our group [called] or respond[ed] to my email.

We were supposed to talk on the phone about how we were going to present it. Throughout the entire process I only communicated with one person. The other do didn't really add much to the project.

Figure 9: Sample responses from student reflections following all group sessions.



Based on their responses, the out-of-class meetings presented some difficulties for the students, as in several cases they could not meet in person. Otherwise, some of the feedback indicated that one of the group members functioned as the leader in terms of getting the other group members involved outside of class, whether by email or phone. I noted this as well in my observations during class, just as Bryan (1996) did in her study: In all of the groups, one person was clearly the leader though not so much a facilitator (as before, sometimes this role was evenly split between two group members) and in three of the four groups, at least one if not two group members contributed minimally.

When I tallied the pluses, checks and minuses, there appeared to be some improvement in the student attitudes about group work, with fewer negative comments emerging than with the earlier prompts following their initial meeting. The comments were, as well, more specific in describing the (perceived) degree of effort made by group members.

Table 3: Student Responses after Group Project 1

Question	Minus	Check	Plus	% Plus/ Check
How did the final group session go?	4	10	2	<b>75</b>
Describe each group member's contribution(s) to the process.	2	13	1	<b>88</b>
How was the activity valuable (or not) in terms of how you interacted with the group members.	1	8	7	<b>94</b>

Much of the negative feedback on the student reflections suggested that having the groups work on PowerPoint slides proved to be somewhat unwieldy, with some students finding it difficult to craft an appropriate slide without immediate input from the rest of the group or the burden of arranging the presentation (and creating missing slides) fell on one, frustrated but hard-working member of the team.

Because this study was conducted in the middle of a semester rather than iteratively (as done in the 2011 cycle), I was compelled to analyze the data between the group assignments in order to make any necessary modifications to enhance the collaborative learning experience for the students with the second assignment. Thus, based on my observations and the student reflection responses, I decided to decrease the scale of the second activity by having them come up with just one paragraph, producing a richer though smaller chunk of text than was required of them with the PowerPoint activity. So rather than having them meet twice in and out of class, I only required one in-class and one out-of-class group session. Because of this, I had them compose just one set of reflective responses following the completion of both group sessions. This would not just assist in concentrating the data I would be collecting, but it would provide the students a last review of paragraphing skills they would need to exhibit on the upcoming in-class and exit essay exams. After they worked in groups, they responded to the following prompts:

- How did your out-of-class session go?
- Have you learned anything about one or more of your group mates that you didn't know before you started working together?

As I had hoped, the student feedback to the second group activity was more positive than the first, with several students commenting on the shared initiative taken by their group members and others noting the high quality of the paragraph they composed.

**Comments receiving a plus:**

I liked this work more than the last one. Students talked more about how to make the paragraph better and everybody talked.

Our paragraph turned out great. Everyone had some ideas and the final editor fixed most of the mistakes we made.

**Comments receiving a check:**

Working in groups is hard but we did ok. Some members talk a lot and some say almost nothing. The paragraph was pretty good though.

I think my group could have been more even. I did a lot of the work and discussion but everyone made some kind of contribution. It just seems that the directions did make people work evenly.

**Comments receiving a minus:**

Group work is a waste of time in a way. Even if our paragraph turned out good, it wasn't written by one of us, so who knows if any of us are good or bad writers.

Our group still couldn't get it together. Even with a short paragraph. Two of us did the work and the others just nodded or agreed that everyone looked good.

Figure 10: Sample responses from student reflections following second group project.

Although, the numerical tally below suggests an overall positive experience for most of the students, their comments reveal some of the common disenchantment expressed by students tasked with group work (as detailed here in Chapter 2): some felt an imbalance of effort and others didn't see the point of composing as team when writing is most often evaluated based on an individual's talents, not a group's. I certainly kept this in mind when I crafted the activities for the later iterations.

Table 4: Student Responses after Paragraph Exercise

Question	Minus	Check	Plus	% Plus/ Check
(1) How did your out-of-class session go?	3	8	4	<b>73</b>
(2) Have you learned anything about one or more of your group mates that you didn't know before you started working together?	3	7	5	<b>67</b>

Based on their feedback over the course of the two activities there appeared to be some improvement in student attitudes about the group work with the percentage of favorable responses increasing with each pair of group sessions. In more practical terms, two ESL students even attributed some skill development to the group sessions, particularly in terms of grammar as one student noted, "I learn[ed] that with the group I can improve my grammatical English, also about the active voice by doing and writing [it] in the paragraph."

Along with the survey and observation data provided above, I was able to compare the students' performance on their first and second in-class essays since the

group work was sandwiched between these two essay exams. In order to pass the developmental writing course, students must pass a blindly graded exit writing sample at the end of the term. Though the directions for the exam differ slightly for native and non-native speakers—with the latter receiving extended composing time--each must produce a brief (1 ½ to 3 page) essay in response to his or her choice of two topics selected by the professor from a set of four topics the students could outline prior to the writing session—ostensibly using their outlines to guide their work during the exit exam period.

In order to prepare my students for this high-stakes exit requirement, I give them two in-class essay exams which account for 70% of their course grade. Therefore, I have a way of ensuring that any student passing the course with a C or better, since the grade is so heavily weighted toward the in-class essays, is indeed prepared for the exit sample as well. With the pilot section, though the class mean on the second essay was higher (85% vs. 75% for the first in-class essay), I don't have data to support that this can be attributed to the group work. In fact, when I asked my students to what did they attribute the difference in score, most of them thought the topics for the second essay were more conducive to better writing. It is notable that, for the 2011 iterations, I would retain only one chief aspect of the methodology from pilot study: the prompting of written reflections after group sessions. Given more time to prepare for the larger study, I was able to craft an approach that would elicit more descriptive and comprehensive data.

Going back to my research questions about the impact of writing groups on productive collaboration and cross-cultural communication, I believe the pilot study,

though not offering substantial data to support the impact of group work on these aspects of learning, did bring to light some of the difficulties in measuring improvements in writing quality or intercultural communication as a result of collaborative learning. Though a few students gave thoughtful, developed responses, I felt I had to stretch it a bit to assign plus or minus to certain comments with a few seeming to fall between a check and either designation. Because of this, I decided, for the 2011 iterations, to use the student feedback to the reflective prompts as a means of detailing the positive and negative aspects of the collaborative activities, not to provide numerical data about their attitudes but to be triangulated with the quantitative data drawn from the Likert survey used pre and post-intervention, my own observations, and those provided by the students who were interviewed at the end of each term.

In keeping with the narrative frame initiated in the first chapter of the dissertation, it is useful to explain why the final study took place nearly three years after the pilot. Over the intervening years, I was busy finishing my coursework, preparing for and taking doctoral comprehensive exams, working as the lead investigator on two grants, and preparing my case for tenure in 2010. Despite all of that, I kept the project in mind, as I continued to teach English 0099 during that period, making adjustments that would characterize my pedagogy and research methodology used during the later iterations: culture-themed readings, group *and* paired activities, and considerably more data collection (questionnaires, essay artifacts and interviews).

The ensuing presentation of the findings from Spring and Fall 2011 reflects my ongoing efforts to improve as a teacher and researcher, not as conclusive evidence but as snapshots of a process that continues. The summary of the final iterations of this

project is guided by the following research questions: 1) How do paired and group writing activities impact student perceptions of the usefulness of collaborative learning? and 2) How does enrollment in a culturally-themed writing class emphasizing paired and group learning affect intercultural attitudes? Therefore, I address the themes of collaborative learning and intercultural attitudes as revealed in the data: the teaching materials, instructor observations, student reflections, survey data and participant interviews. Following a summary of the findings from the Spring 2011 iteration, I describe the changes made for the Fall semester before reviewing the data from that term.

### **Spring 2011 Findings: The Interview Essay**

The Spring 2011 section of English 0099 enrolled 15 students, 10 for whom English was self-identified as their native language and 5 for whom it was not, as they had recently come to the United States from the following countries: Colombia, Haiti, Korea and Turkey. After the first week of class, where we got to know each other and the students were given an overview of the course and my research study, a colleague was brought in to handle the consent process with the students and to administer the pre-study survey.

The first collaborative activity undertaken by the students was the Interview Essay. After reading, writing about and discussing in class Amy Tan's "The Language of Discretion," which chronicles the author's experiences transitioning between her home language (Chinese) and that of her adopted country (American English), the students were paired to interview one another about their own unique language histories. The

pairs were assigned by me so that each student interviewed a classmate with a different home language or American English dialect than his or her own. These pairs were actually determined on the first day of class when the students interviewed one another during the introductory ice-breaking activity, so the students, based on my observations, appeared comfortable rejoining their partners for the Interview Essay assignment (see Figure 11).

### **The Interview Essay**

#### Day 1: Partner Meetings

Exchange reading responses with your partner. While reading his/her paper, look for material that might be useful for your essay about your partner's language experiences, paying particular attention to the third paragraph he/she composed.

After carefully reading one another's reading responses, discuss possible topics for your essays. You might simply follow Tan's lead by considering the types of discretion your partner has had to observe with language. Or you might write about your partner's experience with the differences between spoken and written language in her or her experience. You will share your topics with the class after you have finished your initial conversation.

*Homework:* Make a list of 10 interview questions to ask your partner during next class, as you start to gather material for your outline and essay.

#### Day 2: Interviews

Interview your partner, asking the questions you prepared beforehand and any follow-up questions that emerge during your discussion. Make sure you write down as much of your partner's feedback as possible since it will constitute a big part of your essay. You can always pick and choose what is useful later.



*Homework:* Create an essay outline following one of the schemes provided in *A Writer's Reference* (pp. 8-10) or *One World, Many Cultures* (pp. 16-21).

Day 3: Outline Peer Review/Drafting Session

Look over one another's outlines and provide critical feedback or additional information. You want to help your partner as much as possible at this stage, so that he or she has enough information and an organizational plan that can lead to a quality essay. After your discussion, work individually at a computer stations as you begin to write your essay.

Day 4: Essays Due

First Drafts of Essays are due at the start of class. Your essays will be returned with a grade and comments about ways to improve it during revision. You will be permitted to resubmit the essay once more for a grade.

Figure 11: Interview Essay Assignment Sheet

Once we discussed the Tan essay as a class, the students paired up and, in order to determine useful interview questions to ask their partners, read one another's written responses to the assigned reading. Then, the students conversed freely about aspects of the responses they found provocative with the goal of finding a potential subject for their essays. By the end of the session, the students shared their concepts for their essays with the class, with me and their classmates offering suggestions to help clarify or narrow their topics. For homework, they were required to develop a set of five to ten interview questions that would help elicit enough information from their partners to outline and draft a full essay the following week. Based on my observation,

the students appeared energized by the opportunity to break into pairs and talk. In some cases, social conversations crept into their discussions, but, overall, they seemed to stay on task, with the clearest evidence of this being the ease with which each explained their intended essay topics and plans.

The next class period, they interviewed one another, handwriting their partner's responses which would be used in developing an outline to be brought to class for peer review the following day. After looking over the outlines, the partners worked individually on their essay drafts during class then turned them in at the start of the next session at which time they were asked to write freely and reflectively under the following headings: "My Partner", "The Interview Essay", "The Teacher", and "The Class" (see Figure 12). When introducing the reflection activity, I stressed the importance of their being honest and assured them the responses wouldn't be read until at least one month after the course had been completed. I even left class while they wrote and had one of the students collect the reflections and seal the envelope in which they would be conveyed back to me.

"Working with a partner has been beneficial [...] I have learned about my current partner's language/culture. He has actually encouraged me to learn a second language."

"He is very kind and great because when I didn't understand, he [was more] specific [and] translated to my language using Google."

"It was well thought out to create groups in class because it opens our mind and we feel more comfortable [sharing] our stories among ourselves."

“There [are] new points of view I didn’t think about before conversations with my partner. My own story got a new perspective.”

“It has been a very pleasant experience to work with my partner because we have some things in common about our first experience in a place where we meet coming from different places in the world.”

Figure 12: Positive Reflection Comments about Interview Essay (Spring 2011)

The reflections indicated overall satisfaction with the partnerships and work process with the only critical comment being made by one student who lamented not being able to include many of his or her “ideas and thoughts,” just the partner’s. This was noted in my observation notes, as well, where I commented that “several pairs seem to be struggling to provide lengthy responses to the questions asked, needing further prodding and follow-up questions.” To address this problem, I decided to give them an extra day for interviewing in the fall iteration where they could first script then ask follow-up questions if they were unsatisfied with the feedback provided in the initial session. One other change has to do with the reading assignment, which will be discussed later.

### **The Collaborative Collage Essay**

Although the students continued to work in groups and pairs on occasion for peer review of outlines and essay drafts, I did not maintain observation notes or assign written reflections until the eleventh week, when they started work on the Collaborative Collage, a shared essay project where they work in mixed groups (at least one L1 and L2 student on each team of three or four), planning and composing an essay in

response to a set of readings on “Working Lives” in *One World, Many Cultures*. Over two weeks, the students met in and out of class working on their collage essays. Knowing it would be difficult, logistically, to observe all of the groups at length, I invited a colleague to observe the class as well during one of the group sessions.

On that first day of group work, following closely to Elbow’s Collaborative Collage assignment, the students were placed into teams and shared what they considered to be the strongest parts of their own pre-written reading responses. A few problems immediately cropped up. One student who was absent the previous class period and two who weren’t did not have essays to share with their groups and were assigned to write while their teams moved forward. Perhaps even more worrisome was the fact that all but one group struggled with the directions which did not specify the role of each group member, a key aspect to collaborative learning as seen in the literature (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Bruffee, 1984; Byran, 1996) yet somehow absent from the assignment sheet, which just suggested each student work with his or her own “strong parts” in crafting a single paragraph for the collective essay (see Appendix A). This could result in four or five introduction, conclusions or body paragraphs—clearly poor planning on my part--which I handled as best I could, mid-stream, modifying the assignment sheet quickly and reposting it to the course website as I projected it onscreen for the class, explaining that now each team member would compose a paragraph *after* they agreed on an outline detailing what would go in each (see Collaborative Collage Assignment Sheet in Appendix A). My colleague who observed that day’s session charitably praised me, in her report, as being “responsive to [my] students and flexible.” I was actually quite discouraged by the oversight and struggled to

formulate a passable solution while looking competent doing so. The students appeared to respond graciously, seeming to take the changes in stride.

Among other observations I recorded during their initial group sessions was the phenomenon of a single student quickly assuming a leadership role in the group, even dominating the discussion at times. Although it would, perhaps, be more desirable for the conversations in each group to be more balanced, I had found in previous group assignments with my students that tight facilitation scripts, where each student is required to speak in turn, tends to yield limited participation from more reserved students who offer limited commentary more out of obligation than to benefit the group. This is not to say I didn't intervene occasionally on both group session days with statements like, "Make sure everyone in your group is heard," and "Don't agree if you *don't* agree" with ideas posed by other group members.

After two in and out-of-class planning and writing sessions, the students handed in their Collaborative Collage essays and composed brief reflections on their group work in response to the following prompt: "Describe your feelings about working as a group on this assignment." Again, had I rated their responses using the plus/minus system from the pilot, the pluses would have far outnumbered the minuses. Indeed, much of the feedback is consistent with my hopes for the project, that the students would see the advantages of peer-to-peer interaction not just for the purpose of improving their writing but to enhance their appreciation of culture.

"It's helping me to become more patient with others of different cultures [...]"

exposing someone with limited diversity to become more aware of new things.”

“If somebody doesn’t understand anything in class, if he/she doesn’t want to ask the teacher [...] he/she can ask his group members for clarification.”

“I enjoy the group activities because not only we get to learn about one another, but also learn and understand each other’s opinion.”

“All semester I have noticing the likeness other than the difference. That is because when I read their words that is what I notice; that we are more alike than different.”

“This process helps for us to think deeply and to listen carefully [to] other’s opinion[s].”

“While we discussed, there were disagreements of opinion, but we talked to each other. After that, we could choose one of the opinions that was best.”

“Working in a group motivated [me]. My team members supported me.”

“Our team was awesome. When we met out of class, we shared snacks. It removed our strain.”

“Everyone was very engaged and involved [...] my favorite paper by far. Learned about self and others, bonded with my fellow students.”

Figure 13: Excerpts from Student Reflections on the Collage Essay (Spring 2011)

These comments are notable in number alone since the class only enrolled 15 students and each of these comments was composed by a separate one. Not only do these excerpts reflect satisfaction with the assignment and group effort but suggest, through the phrasing such as “likenesses,” “bonded” and “team,” that the students forged productive relationships with diverse classmates. In fact, the sole interview we were able to schedule with a student from the class added more detail to this perceived success, with the student stating that the Collaborative Collage project was “nice because we have different values, customs and foods. During the group meetings we talked about things besides the assignment.” However, the student did find the group essay writing to be a challenge, concluding that he would have preferred doing it himself. Other concerns were voiced in a few of the student reflections as well.

“I was very disappointed because some of our team members didn’t take the work seriously. Some coming to class empty handed after a long weekend and trying to write something right then. Others claiming they forgot the work at home.”

“It would be helpful to have guidelines to follow or suggestions about how to conduct a group activity. I found myself looking back and reflecting on how we could have communicated better [...] because email didn’t work.”

“I felt let down a times because students didn’t show up [...] there was not email or phone call.”

Figure 14: Critical Feedback on Collaborative Collage (Spring 2011)

Some of the frustration I observed during the group sessions appears here in the student reflections. My colleague observed the impact two students' tardiness had on group morale, wondering, in her report, if I had any policy for lateness, particularly since I didn't appear to address it at all during her visit. Although this should have been a concern of mine, particularly in planning for the Collaborative Collage in the Fall, by that time I somehow overlooked the issue, despite it being noted in my own field notes from Spring. This oversight and a major change in the way the project would be evaluated in the next iteration might have contributed to negative outcomes I should have foreseen but did not. But that, of course, is getting ahead of the story and will be detailed in the findings from the ensuing semester.

### **Survey Comparison**

In the final week of the semester, the students completed the post-survey which provided further evidence that the dissatisfaction with the Collage Essay may have led to a more general circumspection about group learning. Although the questionnaire used for this research provided a range of statements for which the students applied a rating of agreement from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") the discussion of the results is restricted to items that showed the greatest variation from the pre to post-questionnaire averages. Where the means for most items showed the slightest change pre- to post-intervention (when an identical survey was conducted), diverging merely 0 to 2 percent, the averages for items 8 and 10 decreased by more than 10% and address key aspects of the research questions themselves: class diversity and group learning (see Table 5).



Table 5: Survey Results (Spring 2011)

Statement	Pre-survey Avg.	Post-survey
When I attend classes with students from other countries I make a special effort to communicate with them beyond what is required by the instructor.	3.87	3.91
Small group work can help me improve my English skills.	4.07	4.09
I am pretty sure of myself when interacting with people from different cultures.	4.20	3.91
I feel unsure of my ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures.	3.20	3.36
I am patient when talking to people from other cultures.	4.60	4.27
I prefer classes that don't involve working in groups or pairs.	3.87	3.73
I often feel anxious when I am with people from different cultures.	3.40	3.55
<b>Classes with students from other countries are beneficial to my learning.</b>	<b>4.53</b>	<b>3.91</b>
People born in other countries share most of the same values I do.	3.80	3.55
<b>I believe group assignments are productive learning experiences.</b>	<b>4.27</b>	<b>3.82</b>
I believe working with a partner on assignments is valuable for learning.	4.33	4.18
In my future career, I expect I will be working with people from other cultures.	4.33	4.18

Students clearly began the semester with greater confidence in the usefulness of mixed classes and group learning, and although one could make the argument that a mean of 3.8 to 3.9 for items 8 and 10 does not indicate a steep drop-off in agreement, they represent a substantial decrease that certainly wasn't shown in the limited data extracted during the pilot study where student enthusiasm for group work appeared to increase over the albeit brief period studied. However, it must be noted that the student

reflections composed during and following the Interview Essay and Collaborative Collage assignments, like those written during the pilot, were generally positive with very few noting any reservations about either project, making the questionnaire results all the more provocative since they appear to contradict the feedback given immediately following each essay assignment. Of course, one data source could not be relied upon to provide the full picture of how the intervention was proceeding. For example, were I to use the survey data alone to determine how I might approach the Fall 2011 iteration, I may have been inclined to drop the group work altogether. Triangulation of the survey, reflection and interview data provided a richer narrative of the students' intercultural and collaborative work over the course of the semester, and by looking closely at the student responses, my field notes and interview transcripts I felt more able to redesign aspects of the group-work in order to, hopefully, enhance their experiences and attitudes about working with one another.

### **Action Plan for Fall**

It is hard to know for sure whether the generally positive input from students in their reflective writing about two course assignments indicates honest satisfaction, overall, with collaborative and intercultural learning. Even though I stressed the importance of their being candid in their responses and assured their anonymity, it is likely that the position of authority I held as their teacher/evaluator might have at least subconsciously influenced their questionnaire responses and other commentary. This is why it is so essential that action research include numerous forms of data to cross-check for consistency and some degree of validity. And though much of the collected

data suggested the group work was beneficial, some of the reflection and survey data suggested otherwise.

In terms of redesigning the curriculum for the next iteration I extended the timeframe for the Interview Essay, giving more time for conversation throughout the pre-writing and drafting processes (see below). It seem a bit hurried in the spring semester, so I hoped that giving students more time would make the assignment less stressful for them, leading to more developed and thoughtful essays.

### **The Interview Essay**

#### Day 1: Partner Meetings

Exchange reading responses with your partner. While reading his/her paper, look for material that might be useful for your essay about your partner's language experiences, paying particular attention to the third paragraph he/she composed.

After carefully reading one another's reading responses, discuss possible topics for your essays. You might simply follow Tan's lead by considering the types of discretion you or your partner has had to observe with language. Or you might write about your partner's experience with the differences between spoken and written language is her or her experience. You will share your topics with the class following your discussion with your partner.

*Homework:* Make a list of 5 to 10 interview questions to ask your partner during next class, as you start to gather material for your outline and essay.

#### Day 2: Interviews

Interview your partner, asking the questions your prepared beforehand and any follow-up questions that emerge during your discussion. Make sure you write

down as much of your partner's feedback as possible since it will constitute a big part of your essay. You can always pick and choose what is useful later.

*Homework:* Review your notes from the interview session and come up with 5 to 10 more questions to ask your partner during the next class session. This should help ensure that you will have enough information for your essay.

### Day 3: Interviews (cont.)

Ask your partner the questions you brought to class, again taking notes carefully and asking follow-up questions to get as much detail as possible.

*Classwork/Homework:* Create an essay outline following one of the schemes provided in *A Writer's Reference* or *One World, Many Cultures*.

### Day 4: Outline Peer Review/Drafting Session

Look over one another's outlines and provide critical feedback or additional information. You want to help your partner as much as possible at this stage, so that he or she has enough information and an organizational plan that can lead to a quality essay. After your discussion, work individually at a computer stations as your begin to write your essay.

*Homework:* Complete your essay draft and bring hard and electronic copies to class for peer review.

### Day 5: Essay Peer Review

Exchange drafts for peer review. Circle anything that looks like an error on your partner's paper (don't correct it) and provide any useful feedback about the essays content or organization. Offer any additional details that might be necessary as well.

*Classwork/Homework:* Revise your essay based on your partner's feedback. Your first draft is due at the start of next class.

Day 6: Essays Due

First Drafts of Essays are due. Your essays will be returned with a grade and comments about ways to improve it during revision. You will be permitted to resubmit the essay once more for a grade.

Figure 15: Revised Interview Essay Assignment Sheet

I revised the Collaborative Collage assignment as well, providing better clarity and advice for delegating group member roles. The biggest change I made, however, was deciding not to grade the Collaborative Collage but require it as course participation only, in order to see if this would diminish any stress and disappointment that may have led to the negative feedback shown in the observations, reflections and post-questionnaire results from the spring semester.

**Study Findings: Fall 2011**

All data collection methods used in the spring were applied in the fall except the use of an outside observer, which did not occur because of scheduling conflicts that could not be resolved. The section of English 0099 was larger this time, with 25 students enrolled, 18 indicating English as their native language on the pre-questionnaire and 7 indicating another language, as they had recently come to the United States from the following countries: India, Kenya, Korea, Pakistan and Peru.

Data collection for fall 2011 began, again, with the administration of the survey used in spring. Since I concluded the discussion of the spring findings with the pre-post survey comparison, I have chosen to start my presentation of the data collected in fall by looking at the survey data to see if any immediate shifts in attitude might be detected, again focusing on items which showed a change of roughly 10%. Where statements 8 and 10 showed the greatest change in the spring term, statements 2 and 6 saw the widest disparity from pre- to post-survey in the fall.

Table 6: Survey Results (Fall 2011)

Statement	Pre-survey Avg.	Post-survey
When I attend classes with students from other countries I make a special effort to communicate with them beyond what is required by the instructor.	3.17	3.12
<b>Small group work can help me improve my English skills.</b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>3.48</b>
I am pretty sure of myself when interacting with people from different cultures.	3.96	3.96
I feel unsure of my ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultures.	3.41	3.24
I am patient when talking to people from other cultures.	4.17	4.16
<b>I prefer classes that don't involve working in groups or pairs.</b>	<b>3.91</b>	<b>3.32</b>
I often feel anxious when I am with people from different cultures.	3.78	3.96
Classes with students from other countries are beneficial to my learning.	4.09	3.84
People born in other countries share most of the same values I do.	3.22	3.44
I believe group assignments are productive learning experiences.	3.87	3.68
I believe working with a partner on assignments is valuable for learning.	3.91	3.84
In my future career, I expect I will be working with people from other cultures.	4.30	4.32

For nearly all of the items the average response in fall was lower on the pre-survey than in the spring, so this group started out slightly less enthusiastic about mixed classes and group work, particularly, as represented by their response to statement #2: “Small group work can help me improve my English skills.” Since the focus of this research is attitude rather than skill enhancement, the average of the students’ responses to statement #6 (“I prefer working in classes that don’t involve working in groups or pairs”) is worth noting as it suggests that the students found the group work somewhat more valuable this time around. Some of the students’ reflective writing after the Interview Essay and Collaborative Collage problematize this conclusion; however, there were several positive responses following the Interview Essay (see below).

“It was a good solid project, gave us some insight on another student that we might have not known about them. Very interesting and fun essay.”

“The only thing that I can point out is that it gives you an interesting look at another person’s life and culture [...] a positive experience.”

“The interview essay was fun because it was totally different [than] any other type of essay. It was good to write a story about someone [and] get their feedback on how well I did.”

“This project was a positive to me. I learned a lot about my partner’s culture which I had not known. She was very helpful with editing and making sure I have enough information to create a well [thought out] paper.”

“I feel good about the interview essay project. It was good to know new

things about new people and get to know more about different cultures.”

Figure 16: Excerpts from Selected Student Reflections on Interview Essay (Fall 2011)

Since the new edition of their textbook excluded Tan’s “Language of Discretion,” the students were asked to interview one another following our reading and discussion of customs rather than language use. This broadened the possibilities for essay content and seemed to, through my observation, enrich their conversations and, ultimately, the essays themselves. I observed the increased interaction mentioned in the reflection responses which can be attributable to the extended time allotted for the project (they were given an extra day to interview one another since it seemed so hurried in spring). In my observations taken while they worked in pairs on the Interview Essay I made this entry:

Their conversations seem so much more active this time. It’s actually getting loud in here. They’ve jumped right in. Each pair is talking as if they’ve known each other for a while and are sincerely interested in what they have to say. At least that’s the way it looks and sounds.

This isn’t to say that all or even most students found the Interview Essay to be more productive this time, as some of the reflection responses critiqued various aspects of their interactions.

“I felt the interview essay was not something I’d want to do again. I like writing and usually have no trouble [but] my partner ][had] no feedback or insight into



my work.”

“My partner wasn’t a great help with detail and information, which was a bummer; however, I was able to put in my own creative part into the paper [...] which was why I enjoyed it so much.”

“Sometimes it was hard to actually write the paper due to the lack of depth given to me by the person I interviewed.”

“I think the interview essay is good and bad. It’s good because you can learn different things from different culture, however if your partner doesn’t have anything to talk about then that would make it difficult for you.”

Figure 17: Critical Reflections on Interview Essay (Fall 2011)

Even when given more time to work together, particularly during the revision stage, some students clearly grew frustrated with the limited editorial input from their peers which, from my vantage point wasn’t surprising considering their course placement and the high stakes environment of a developmental writing classroom. And even though I extended the amount of time the pairs had to interview one another and share essay drafts, students still complained of their partners being too reserved, limiting the potential content for their papers. This frustration with underperformance was addressed as well in the reflections written following the Collaborative Collage.

Accountability is often stressed in literature (Johnson & Johnson, 1989; Bryan, 1996) about collaborative learning, suggesting that such tasks must be organized so each group member has a distinct responsibility in the learning process. With the

Collage Essay, I tried to make group member roles clear and transparent while giving each group the leeway to determine which team member was best suited for the role appointed (outliner, writer, editor...). With some groups, as shown in select student reflections, the work was successfully delegated, with students commenting that “our group worked great together. We communicated well, all contributed equally” or “My group worked well together as a team and I think completed the task with ease.” However, for a few groups, this clearly wasn’t the case, particularly in the fall iteration where the group essay was not graded per se, just factored into the student’s overall course participation. Thus, a common theme in the student reflections during and after the group assignment was a lack of accountability on the part of certain group members as illustrated below.

“Some of the group members didn’t show up for class and they didn’t contribute anything to the essay.”

“I had to do most of the work. My group wasn’t prepared and two of my group members did not contribute a thing [...] it wasn’t a fun and all that great of an experience.”

“However, when group members did not show up multiple times it made the process a lot harder.”

“I know the teacher can’t control a student’s attendance, but this was my only negative point in the essay process.”

“If your group members are lacking, not attending class on a regular basis and

you end up doing all the work then grouping is not a great choice.”

Figure 18: Critical Student Reflections on Collage Essay (Fall 2011)

If such comments only cropped up in five or six (of over 50) reflections, they could be attributable to just one or two underperforming students. However, these sentiments persisted over both semesters and were conveyed by more than a third of the student responses, though sometimes mixed with considerable positive feedback. Of course, as the instructor/observer, I too witnessed the drop-off in attendance during the Collage Essay sessions, but can only speculate as to why this occurred: low motivation since the project wouldn't be graded, shyness, and/or anxiousness about sharing ideas in small groups, particularly among L2 learners. Clearly several students experienced frustration with this and other aspects of the Collage Essay and, in similar ways, the Interview Essay. So it can be suggested that the decrease in enthusiasm for group work, as shown in the questionnaire data from spring and, to a lesser degree, fall is a result of at least two factors: poor assignment planning on my part and a lack of accountability on the part of some students.

The student reflections and interviews do indicate that the collaborative work in English 0099 was successful, to a degree. As the adult learner interviewed after the fall iteration noted, "I've been in the work force a number of years. If you don't work well with other people, you're not going to make it. It was a great exercise. The young guys and girls in there were not used to it. They got a lot out of it, and I still got a lot out of it." Addressing the intercultural aspects of the course, he continued, "In dealing with other cultures, we're more alike than different [...] we may have different mannerisms and

ways of saying things but we're more alike." Though his was just one voice among many in this study, it does illustrate, from a student's perspective, the rationale for the intercultural and collaborative pedagogy used in this study.

## 5 CONCLUSION

To be persuasive, the teacher researcher's ethos must be represented as discontinuous, the present self portrayed as significantly different from her former one(s). (Wall, 2004, p.2).

Since 2011, I have continued to see the impact of my action research project on my teaching and students' efforts, as well as its broader implications for my department and university. Whether, as Wall contends, my story conveys how this project has changed how I understand myself is hard for me to determine objectively. One thing I have learned about change during the course of this research is that it must be accepted as continuous and governed as often by external as well as personal circumstances. Nevertheless, I do feel that I now approach the classroom with greater confidence balanced with realism about what I can and can't accomplish with my students.

Although this project has been an opportunity to chart my own growth as a more reflective and innovative teacher, I especially wanted to know if the course I modified could further benefit the students in their intercultural attitudes and communication. According to Perotti (1992), "education for cultural plurality should not be conceived of as a temporary measure but as an attitude, a state of mind, with regard to a situation that is going to endure" (p. 16). In hindsight, it was ambitious for me to think that one semester of intercultural learning and exchange would lead to appreciable changes in intercultural attitudes among my students. After all, cultural sensitivity takes much longer and even requires intensive training for some, and that, of course, doesn't ensure

success in transforming one's worldview. However, once achieved, it is a lasting accomplishment. As Perotti notes, altered perceptions of otherness, once taken root, are enduring attitudes that permanently change how we interact with people we may have once avoided or misunderstood.

### **Discussion of Findings**

By observing the students paired and group interactions as well as their work with culture-themed assignments, I too have developed a richer understanding of the challenges of and necessity for continued intercultural learning. However, as the data from my study indicates, students appreciated the opportunity to work with others but were less certain of its academic benefits, which might have been expected, considering the high stakes exit requirements for the course that must be accomplished individually rather than collaboratively. In fact, when I isolated the survey data into discrete L1 and L2 averages, although both groups showed the decrease in enthusiasm revealed in the combined figures, the L1 group indicated a greater decline in appreciation for group work and mixed-enrollment classes (see below).

Table 7: Survey Results (Spring/Fall 2011 Combined)

Statement	Pre (L1 & L2)	Post (L1 & L2)	Pre (L1 only)	Post (L1 only)
Classes with students from other countries are beneficial to my learning.	4.23	3.86	3.91	3.64
I believe group assignments are productive learning experiences.	4.01	3.72	3.86	3.55

From my observations and the interview responses, I would assume this difference to be attributable to fact that the immersion sought by the L2 students and offered by group learning made them less circumspect about its benefits than their L1 peers. It should be noted that the roughly 10% decrease in agreement (combined L1 and L2) with statements on the survey affirming group work or mixed classes does not indicate actual disagreement. As shown in Chapter 4, the students' level of agreement decreased but remained, on average, near or above 4 ("Agrees"), a distinction pointed out by a colleague with whom I shared the data, and who suggested that even the L1 students' level of agreement, though lower in the post-intervention surveys, still reveals an appreciation for group work, perhaps due their assumption that team work may be a part of the work they do in upper level courses, graduate school and in their future careers.

In terms of what other researchers might take away from the findings of this study, I would hope they consider how the implications described here apply not just to classroom dynamics but to the need for broader curricular and programmatic change. Clearly the benefits of intercultural and collaborative learning are well-documented in the literature and, to some degree, in my research here; however, as developmental education continues to undergo public, institutional and even governmental scrutiny, program directors might reconsider the impact of high-stakes exit requirements on curriculum development and classroom teaching, which can often be stunted by the need to focus on often reductive (sentence and paragraph-level) skills the students must demonstrate on standardized essay or multiple-choice exams, rather than the

more sophisticated rhetorical abilities they will be expected to display in their general education and major coursework.

Another area for consideration for program coordinators working with diverse populations would be to add an oral component to developmental writing courses which enroll ESL students since the literature suggests that oral and written target language abilities are benefited by a synthesized audio-lingual curriculum which seeks to develop both modes of delivery. Since developmental studies programs employ faculty who often lack budgetary support for conference travel, particularly during the current economic climate, it might be worthwhile for states to develop faculty trainers at each university and community college to facilitate discussion on the best practices for enhancing the basic writing curriculum on each campus. Further details about why and how this might be accomplished are provided in the ensuing discussion of the implication of my research for my program and campus.

### **Next Steps: Impact on My Teaching and Program Coordination**

I plan to continue teaching the course in ways informed by this research, retaining the intercultural theme established in 2011 by having the students read, discuss and write about history, customs and traditions. Where my teaching philosophy previously emphasized process, transition (from personal to academic writing) and the incorporating of technology, I plan to add, in my next promotion narrative in Fall 2012 a section on how I now apply a more intercultural, internationalist pedagogy in all of my classes. This means continuing (though modifying) the readings and assignment used for this study in English 0099 and extending the global theme to my teaching of



Freshman Composition (1101 and 1102), where students will explore cultural issues such as immigration and globalism in their reading, class discussions and composing. One of the indirect consequences of my study has been the introduction of field research methods in my teaching of the higher level composition courses. When I teach a general education course in research writing each spring, my students now do qualitative research projects which involve the use of surveys, observations and interviews as they develop research reports about topical issues such as bullying, year-round school, substance abuse and problems associated with body image. Once the students have finished their write-ups, I ask them to compose a few paragraphs describing what they would do differently if they did the project again.

In the spirit of that assignment, if I were to continue the study described here, I would make a few changes for the next iteration in terms of data collection, such as vetting the survey, reflection and interview questions more thoroughly through the use of collegial and student focus groups in order to ensure that the questions elicit more accurate and substantive feedback. I would make sure at least two students were interviewed at the end of the term, one L1 student and one L2 student, so that I could better develop and analyze data about how the course was experienced by representatives from each classification. And, as Bishop (2001) suggests, I would ask the students who were interviewed to review the transcripts of those sessions in order to provide any corrections or additional input they might offer.

To make the research more informative I would also consider studying groups in sections of English 0099 taught by other faculty, giving me a more distanced vantage point to record observations during their group work. It was challenging to take field

notes while teaching the class and responding to inquiries while the student work collaboratively. Of course, audio or video recording, which was done in some of the studies I cited in Chapter 2, might provide a more convenient and comprehensive alternative to personally composed observations; however, during preparations for this study, I decided against using a camera or tape recorder, as I felt it might inhibit student participation and dialogue.

Among the advantages of conducting this study over several iterations (including the pilot) is that I am now able to make changes going forward while looking back over a longer period of time (than just one semester) to determine if anything was lost in the modifications I made each term. For example, in rereading the student reflections from both 2011 iterations, it became apparent that although the students in both classes spoke well of their experience, the ones from the spring, who interviewed one another in response to the Amy Tan essay, “The Language of Discretion,” reflected more passionately about their discussions and overall interaction with the text itself. Therefore, in 2012, I reintegrated the Tan essay as background reading for the Interview Essay and moved “Valley of the Gun” later in the term when students were preparing for their first in-class essay; and I replaced “Grandmother’s Sunday Dinner” with what I believe to be the more relevant and provocative “The Convocation,” an excerpt from the graphic novel *Persepolis*, which chronicles a young Iranian’s experiences during the Islamic Revolution in the early 1980s.

Having seen a similar dynamic in comparing student feedback from the collage essay to the group presentation assigned during the pilot, I reinstated the use of PowerPoint for the culminating group project in 2012. Rather than having the students

collaborating on a full essay, they created a set of PowerPoint slides mapping—through text and pictures-- a plan for a theoretical essay in response to assigned readings in the textbook unit, “Working Lives.” This change increased, through my observation and the students’ informal feedback, engagement between L1 and L2 students during preparation and presentation of their slide shows.

As Learning Support English Coordinator, I am well positioned to influence how the developmental reading and writing courses are taught by the part-time faculty who teach most sections. In fact, most English 0099 faculty ask me for curricular input and often employ the same texts and assignments I do since they are already engaged, full-time, in high school teaching during the day and confide to me that they lack the time necessary to adequately construct a pedagogy for the developmental courses they teach for us in the evenings. The part-time faculty who teach for us during the day are also new to college teaching, often working for the first time outside the context of a graduate assistantship, and are all-to-happy to be given some guidelines from which to build a curriculum.

This gives me the opportunity to see how an intercultural and collaborative pedagogy works, with some modification and personalization, with new faculty assigned to the course and has led to my preparation of curriculum materials for part-time faculty orientation, where I provide them an overview of what I have seen when implementing a collaboratively and culturally interactive pedagogy for English 0099. With two new faculty joining us this semester (Spring 2013), this has apparently worked very well, with both claiming that the culture-themed readings have led to quality discussions and compositions, and one faculty member making a special effort to let me know that the

Interview Essay went so well that she plans to use it in her day classes at the high school where she teaches full time. I have even modified the course once again, in response to part-time faculty turnover and my own desire to keep improving the course. In Spring 2013, I changed the readings assignment for the Interview Essay and dropped the final group project altogether, favoring small group peer-review work as students developed their own essays on “Working Lives” (see ENGL 0099 Faculty Guide/FAQ in Appendix B).

For my campus, this research project, in its aims to study and improve the teaching and learning of students just starting their post-secondary educations, reflects State U.’s commitment to innovative teaching and its emerging status as an international university, one that serves students from over 100 countries whether in its various study abroad programs or the globally enhanced content offered throughout the undergraduate curriculum. Davis, Cho and Hagenson (2005) have lauded such efforts for encouraging an atmosphere of openness and acceptance while providing faculty the necessary skills for working with increasingly diverse student populations. During the inception and delivery of this study, State U. established and implemented a reaccreditation quality enhancement plan themed “getting global,” with the goal of “preparing students to be leaders and creating a campus culture that assures appreciation of diversity.” Already, for these efforts, State U. has been acknowledged by two national organizations for its efforts. As all departments and colleges have been tasked with identifying and building globally-themed offerings and programing, this study has been one of the primary contributions to my department’s efforts for quality enhancement, reflecting the broader implications for my study.

In the much broader context of composition studies, basic writing theory and research continues to be characterized by shifts in approaches to teaching, administration and overall attitudes about its appropriateness in four year settings. State governments, strapped for funds during the latest economic recession, have once again, as they did in early nineties, targeted remediation for budget savings, in my state, attempting to shift most if not all developmental studies courses to community and technical colleges. This could significantly reduce, once again, the number of students admitted to State U. who require developmental courses. In fact, there is already talk on campus of mainstreaming some would-be developmental writing students into the general education curriculum with tutorial rather than full-course learning support. Since this process is governed by the federal Complete College America initiative, which seeks to increase graduation and retention rates by accelerating “remedial “ students more quickly through the curriculum, I see an opportunity for faculty like myself, who have significant theoretical and practical knowledge of developmental education, to help facilitate this transition which will have significant implications for developmental studies programs and faculty. Indeed, I have already been asked to join a small task force to look into the best ways we might institute Complete College America in our state.

Even the most recent call for proposals to the College Composition and Communication (2012) national convention focuses on the implications of this phenomenon, asking scholars to consider the ramifications of government mandated administrative and curricular changes to basic studies. Thus, the conversation continues from Washington to small towns throughout the country with the only certainty being change. And having done a substantial amount of reading on the topic of mainstreaming

basic writers, I feel confident that I can be a contributor to the campus discussion of how to best navigate any forthcoming shift in programming for basic writing students. In fact, these conversations have already commenced, with a mainstreaming pilot study planned for 2014.

More broadly, in following through an essential aspect of action research, dissemination of results, I have already presented findings from this study at the two largest national conferences dedicated to research and practice in developmental education. These opportunities to share all aspects of my dissertation research, from conception to data analysis, are not purely dissemination, as I have built in time for critical feedback and conversation about this work, bringing back to my colleagues valuable insight from professionals who attended my sessions and shared their own experiences with intercultural learning, teacher research or mainstreaming. At the most recent presentation I gave, more than half of those in attendance requested I send them the Interview Essay assignment materials so they might incorporate them into their teaching.

### **Next Steps: Impact on Future Research**

In terms of furthering the scholarly conversation in the field of composition studies, this project adds yet another timely practitioner perspective on basic writing pedagogy and teacher research. Where Shaughnessy, Bartholomae, Rose and many others debated how to best serve underprepared students in the context of actual basic writing courses, modern voices in the basic writing conversation come not just from classrooms and journals but the halls of state and federal government. Hopefully, my

narrative, like theirs, provides insights about how basic writing remains a vital site for professional consideration with far-reaching implications for the communities from which basic writers come and the professional world we hope they will enter upon completing their post-secondary educations.

For current researchers, my work might compel further study of intercultural attitudes and collaborative learning in not just face-to-face writing classes but in electronic contexts as well, where many students from all over the world receive English instruction online, more than likely, at least occasionally, working in heterogeneous pairs and groups. Scholars might consider whether collaborative learning is more or less effective in online courses or what significance ethnicity plays in electronically mediated communication in that context. Since it is likely that virtual and live classes will continue to be populated by increasingly diverse student populations, I would think that the themes of globalism and interculturality will remain relevant to the teaching and research in many fields, not just English composition. As methodology, action research, in its iterative and qualitative application, is suitable for classroom and program assessment and modification. However, action research does present challenges for the teacher researcher, as I found it occasionally challenging to teach and observe simultaneously, often losing thoughts that came to mind while trying to effectively carry out the work of the teacher researcher. If I were to attempt an action research project in the future, I might be inclined to carry out the research from the outside, observing and studying the application of new teaching strategies in another faculty member's classroom.

### **Looking Backward to Move Forward**

It has been over a year since the final iteration of my study, and I am teaching ENGL 0099 for the third semester without collecting data or maintaining a reflective log. Nevertheless, I am still seeing the self-segregation that spurred the research for my dissertation, though now seeing it more for what it is than what I feared it might be. With the continued tightening of admissions criteria at the universities in our state system the numbers continue to shrink with the proportion of ESL students increasing to a two and even three-to-one (native speaker) ratio in each developmental writing class since ESL students are placed using different measures than those applied to native speakers. In fact, it is conceivable that once mainstreaming takes place, the classes will be populated almost exclusively by international students. Where this might have given me pause (even panicked me) a few years ago, by reviewing the ESL literature and constructing and applying the intercultural curriculum for this study, I am comfortable with this possibility and have already worked on identifying and hiring part-time faculty with ESL experience.

Not only has this study benefited my practices in the developmental writing classroom, but it has led me to become more reflective about how I teach my ENGL 1101 and 1102 classes, opening my eyes to some of the self-imposed limitations to my pedagogy and ways of strengthening my students' experiences of the course, students who are certainly more homogenous than those in the 0099 classes, but who can sometimes come across as foreign in their need for encouragement and predictability—likely a holdover from the perhaps more nurturing and, in ways, hyper-structured high school environment—and their occasionally off-putting attachment to social media and



apparent sense of entitlement which has been described in great detail by those who have labeled them millennial and post-millennial students or “generation me” (Twenge, 2006). In the past, I have allowed these observations to discourage me, to push me toward pedagogical choices that betray a far more foundational stance with which I ever wished to align myself. But through my work over the past three years I now find myself more willing to reconsider ways to connect with my college writing students and make use of that which distinguished them from students of the past by having them, for example, look at the rhetorical implications of texting and social media.

Yes, action research has opened the door not just as a means of professional development and advancement but as a way to look more deeply at what I do in the classroom and why I do it. Though I may not have collected any more official data about the efficacy of my collaborative and intercultural pedagogy since 2011, reflection remains an aspect of how I approach my professional work, leading to a pedagogy that continues to benefit my developmental writing students as they prepare for “mixed” upper level courses and careers in which they can prosper through having acquired a greater understanding for and attitude about cooperation and cultural difference.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Collaborative Collage Assignment Sheet

#### Collaborative Collage

##### Wednesday, March 23

1. Before getting into groups, read over your essay, highlighting the best parts.
2. Get in your groups and exchange your work until everyone has read all of the highlighted sections and has written feedback for each author.
3. As a group decide on the sequence for the paragraphs, and whether anything needs to be added. Create an outline.
4. ***For Homework:*** Individually rewrite your contribution into paragraph form. Bring a typed copy of the paragraph to class Monday and have a way to access it on computer as well.

##### Monday, March 28

1. Get into your groups and exchange paragraphs until everyone has read and written comments on each.
2. Take turns asking questions about any comments you don't fully understand.
2. For the remainder of class, work individually on revising your paragraph based on your peers' feedback.

##### Wednesday, March 30

1. Bring your updated paragraphs to class and make sure you have electronic access to it so it can be added to the others.



2. Assemble the Collage Essay, print 4 copies (one of you can read it on the computer) and read through it individually before making final revisions.
3. Submit essay; then, handwrite an evaluation of each group member's efforts.
4. If you have time, handwrite a reflection about the whole process/assignment. Be honest and detailed about what you liked and/or didn't like about doing the assignment. If you don't finish in class, take it home and complete it (no name on it) and hand it in Monday.

## Appendix B: ENGL 0099 Faculty Guide (Spring 2013)

### **ENGL 0099 FAQ/Faculty Guide**

#### **What is English 0099?**

English 0099 is a Learning Support Programs course which prepares students for credit courses in English. English 0099 is designed to help students master the fundamentals of effective essay writing so that they may successfully complete the exit requirements for the course and enter English 1101 with improved writing skills.

In English 0099, the following topics are explored through lecture, discussion and group work: the writing process, sentence patterns, essay organization and development, and correct grammar and mechanics.

#### **Who is required to take English 0099?**

All nontraditional students and students coming directly out of high school who are admitted to KSU with a score of 430 to 490 on the verbal portion of the SAT (17 to 20 on the ACT) are required to take the COMPASS entrance exam.

Those who score below 61 on the writing section of COMPASS are required to take English 0099. International students who score 70 to 89 on the Michigan Test or below 70 on the TOEFL are also required to take English 0099. Over the years, we have seen a shift in enrollment to mostly nontraditional and international students.

#### **What are the exit requirements for English 0099?**

In order to successfully exit English 0099, students must do the following:

- Earn a grade of C (70%) or better in their coursework
- Pass an in-class, “blindly” graded Exit Writing Sample
- and, *if required*, pass the COMPASS exit exam (generally required of adult, native speaking learners).

**What type of class enrollment can I expect?**

The class size for ENGL 0099 typically ranges from 15 to a maximum of 25 students. Due to a variety of factors, students who take ENGL 0099 are usually native speaker adult learners or non-native speaking international students who are relatively new to the country. A few of your students may be traditional-aged students, with some having been admitted to the university as “Presidential Exceptions” as a result of their potential contributions to the university community due to their athletic or artistic talents.

**What should I stress when teaching the course?**

First and foremost, you should emphasize the art of crafting a well-organized and support essay. To do so, you might take students slowly through each stage of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting and revising. Since students must pass an in-class essay exam at the end of the term, you should provide them opportunities to compose essays during class in preparation for the Exit Exam.

In terms of grammar and structure, the chapter “Grammatical Sentences” in A Writer’s Reference should be assigned at least in part, including the self-grading online exercises. Areas of concern are typically run-ons, fragments and pronoun and verb agreement. There is an excellent section in the handbook on ESL issues that should be useful for international students who sometimes make up  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the students enrolled in a particular section.

**What should my syllabus look like?**

Although I welcome part-time faculty to create their own calendars and assignments, I almost always asked to provide a sample syllabus to be followed at

least during the first term that a new faculty member teaches. Therefore I have provided one on the following pages.

**What is the program's philosophy of teaching and learning for ENGL 0099?**

In response to various factors (student demographics, faculty training and current pedagogical theories), we have developed a course in basic writing that stresses intercultural learning through the use of a globally-themed reader, *One World, Many Cultures*, and class discussions and writing assignments with international themes. This is not to say that discussions and writings about American life are excluded—quite the contrary, since much of the reading, discussion and writing is geared at bringing comparative and contrastive vantage points on politics and culture.

**A special note from the LSP English/Reading Coordinator:**

*Welcome to our program. Please know that I am available for encouragement and consultation during my campus office hours and, via email, practically any time of day or night. I will do my best to promptly respond to your inquiries promptly and welcome any feedback you can provide for the benefit of the course. The syllabus provided here is the one I am currently using in my own teaching, but you are welcome to modify it in any way you see fit.*

*Thank you for teaching with us.*

*D. Michael Keleher*

*Assistant Professor of English*

*Learning Support English/Reading Coordinator*

**English 0099/01 -- Writing for Academic Purposes - Spring 2013****MW 11:00AM – 12:15PM/LB430****Mr. Michael Keleher**

**Office:** Library 438  
**Phone:** 770.423.6226  
**Email:** mkeleher@kennesaw.edu  
**Office Hrs:** TR 9:30 – 11:30

**Course Description**

English 0099 is a Learning Support Programs course that prepares students for credit courses in English. This course emphasizes principles of good writing, particularly in clear and logically written essays. *This particular section of ENGL 0099 will emphasize the theme of culture by exploring, through assigned readings and writing projects, the diversity and commonality of cultural experience, often reflected in the students enrolled in the course, who represent a variety of cultural backgrounds. The course also offers students paired and group activities to help maximize their communication and cooperation in developing their college writing skills.*

**Goals and Objectives**

English 0099 is designed to help students master the fundamentals of effective essay writing so that they may successfully complete the exit requirements for the course and enter English 1101 with reasonable expectations of success. English 0099 focuses on the principles of correct, effective writing, including standard English usage, organization, development and coherence of ideas, as well as correct grammar and mechanics.

**Required Text(s)**

*One World, Many Cultures*

*A Writer's Reference* (Hacker); textbook website (includes grammar and writing quizzes and activities): [dianahacker.com/writersref](http://dianahacker.com/writersref)

**Grading and Exit Requirements**

In order to successfully exit ENGL 0099, you must make a grade of C or better in your coursework, pass the Final Writing Sample and, if required by your instructor, pass the COMPASS computer-adaptive exam.

Grading scale:

90 – 100%	A
80 – 89%	B
70 – 79%	C
60 – 69%	D
59% or below	F

**Grade distribution:**

In-class essays	60%
Other compositions	30%
Quizzes	10%
Total	100%

**Assignments and Course Content**

English 0099 is a process-centered writing course. Therefore, you will be expected to do a great deal of planning, writing and revising during class. Your grade, as shown on the previous page, is based on two in-class essays, other compositions, and participation.

As the aforementioned grade distribution suggests, your final grade is based heavily on two in-class essays, which you will compose during class on the dates provided in the attached course outline. Your in-class essay grades will reflect the dedication you put into the many prewriting, writing and revision activities you complete in and out of class.

You will be required to take online grammar quizzes as well. The scores from the quizzes will be averaged to determine your quiz grade for the course.

Here is a detailed breakdown of the major assignments and activities that comprise English 0999.

**1. Course Participation**

For your success in English 0099, it is essential that you attend class regularly. Although there are exceptions for documented emergencies (medical, work or other unavoidable situations) and KSU sports team play, you will be expected to attend all class sessions. If you miss class, you are responsible for the work assigned for that day. If you accumulate 6 unexcused absences you may fail the course for low attendance.

**2. Compositions and In-class Essays**

In this course, you will compose reading responses and essays assigned throughout the term. These will be evaluated for correctness and quality of content and development. Because you must pass the Exit Writing Sample, which is composed in class at the end of the term, the 2 In-class Essays comprise the majority of your grade. Consider these your examinations for this course. I will provide you a list of four topics during the class immediately preceding the date of each in-class essay. At the start of the next class period, you will be presented a choice of two of those topics from which you will choose one on which to write.

**3. The Writing Sample and Compass**

If your course grade, at the end of the term, is a “C” or better, you will be invited to take the Exit Writing Sample, which will be graded by department faculty on a pass/fail basis. Two of three English faculty graders must assign your essay a passing grade for you to move on to English 1101. Some students will be required as well to pass the COMPASS exam. Your instructor will let you know if this is required of you.

### Explanation of Regents Policy

The policy of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia places these restrictions on all Learning Support Programs students:

1. Students who are required to take Learning Support classes must take all of those classes each semester that they are enrolled. If they are not required to take all three areas (English, math, reading), they may enroll in credit courses while they are taking their Learning Support courses.
2. Students may not withdraw from Learning Support courses without withdrawing from their credit courses as well.
3. Students not required to take Learning Support courses who wish to take these courses voluntarily should audit or else accept all restrictions imposed on Learning Support students.
4. Students may not accumulate more than 20 hours of academic credit before completing their Learning Support requirements. Those who reach the twenty-hour limit will be withdrawn from any further credit courses until they satisfy the requirement.
5. Students may not attempt any Learning Support course more than two times. **Those who spend two semesters in any one of the three developmental disciplines (English, math, reading) without successfully exiting will be excluded from the university.** They may not be readmitted unless these requirements and general education composition courses (ENGL 1101 and 1102) are completed at another University System school.

### Academic Integrity

Every student is responsible for upholding the provisions of the Student Code of Conduct as published in the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs. Section II of the Student Code of Conduct addresses the University's policy on academic honesty, including provisions regarding plagiarism and cheating, unauthorized access to University materials, misrepresentation/falsification of University records or academic work, malicious removal, retention, or destruction of library materials, malicious or intentional misuse of computer facilities and/or services, and misuse of student identification cards. Incidents of alleged academic misconduct will be handled through the established procedures of the University Judiciary Program, which includes either an "informal" resolution by a faculty member, resulting in a grade adjustment, or a formal hearing procedure, which may subject a student to the Code of Conduct's minimum one semester suspension requirement.

**Course Calendar** (*Dates/ activities may change at your instructor's discretion*)

<i>Week 1</i>	Jan 9	W:	Introductions to one another, the course
<i>Week 2</i>	Jan 14/16	M:	<u>Discussion</u> : Using MS Word <u>Homework</u> : Read G1 in Handbook (AWR 175-183)
		W:	<u>Discussion</u> : Subject-verb Agreement; online exercises. <u>Homework</u> : Read "Valley of the Gun" (OWMC 31-35) Complete 3 paragraph reading response (see handout) and bring 2 copies to next class session.
<i>Week 3</i>	Jan 21/23	M:	HOLIDAY - NO CLASS
		W:	<u>Discussion</u> : "Valley of the Gun" and the Interview Essay <u>Homework</u> : Read "Writing Your Essay," OWMC 16-21; Bring interview questions to class
<i>Week 4</i>	Jan 28/30	M:	<u>Discussion</u> : What is an essay? Interview session <u>Homework</u> : Compose 4-5 paragraph Interview Essay and bring 2 copies to next class session
		W:	<u>Peer review/writing session</u> ; first draft of Interview Essay due at end of class <u>Homework</u> : Read G5 in Handbook (AWR 212-218); Complete G5 exercises online
<i>Week 5</i>	Feb 4/6	M:	<u>Discussion</u> : Sentence fragments and Run-ons <u>Homework</u> : Complete G6 online exercises
		W:	G6 exercises (cont.)
<i>Week 6</i>	Feb 11/13	M:	<u>Discussion</u> : Essay structure and editorial symbols Interview Essays returned; questions for Mr. K <u>Homework</u> : Final Interview Essay draft due at beginning of class Wednesday
		W:	<u>Discussion</u> : Definition and Example; Outlining practice with sample essays Distribution of Topics for 1 <sup>st</sup> in class essay



			Homework: Create outlines for IC1 topics
<i>Week 7</i>	Feb 18/20	M:	In-class Essay 1
		W:	In-class Essay 1 (cont. for ESL students)
<i>Week 8</i>	Feb 25/27	M:	Discussion: Freewriting and keeping a journal—writing about things that happen and what you think about them
		W:	NO CLASS – Work on Journal (happenings and thoughts)
<i>Week 9</i>	Mar 4/6		<b>NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK</b>
<i>Week 10</i>	Mar 11/13	M:	Discussion: Your Journals; In-class essays returned Online exercises on “Wordiness” and “ESL Challenges” <u>Homework</u> : Read “Body Art as Visual Language” ( <i>OWMC</i> 107-115); Complete 3 paragraph reading responses and bring to class Wednesday
		W:	NO CLASS
<b><i>March 13<sup>th</sup> is Last Day to Withdraw Without Academic Penalty</i></b>			
<i>Week 11</i>	Mar 18/20	M:	Discussion of reading assignment/responses Prewriting for Body Art Essay <u>Homework</u> : Compose detailed outline of Body Art Essay and bring 2 copies to next class session
		W:	Outline peer review then in-class drafting session <u>Homework</u> : Continue writing draft of Body Art Essay and bring electronic draft (saved on flash drive or email) to class Wednesday
<i>Week 12</i>	Mar 25/27	M:	<u>Revision session</u> : Body Art Essays due at end of class <u>Homework</u> : Read “Why I Quit the Company” ( <i>OWMC</i> 197-200); Compose responses to six questions on p. 191 after reading the essay and bring responses to class Monday
		W:	Discussion of reading assignment/responses

			Prewriting for Working Life Essay <u>Homework</u> : Compose introduction of Working Life Essay and bring 2 copies to next class session
<i>Week 13</i>	Apr 1/2	M:	Intro. peer review then in-class drafting session <u>Homework</u> : Continue writing draft of Working Life Essay and bring electronic draft (saved on flash drive or email) to class Monday
		W:	Peer review (in groups) of Body Art and Working Life Essays to determine the stronger essay for final revision <u>Homework</u> : Revise either Body Art or Working Life essay and submit it to instructor via email by 5pm Friday
<i>Week 14</i>	April 8/10	M:	Essays returned; revision workshop Homework: Revise final draft of essay to be submitted at start of class Wednesday
		W:	Distribution of In-class Essay 2 topics; Outlining Session Homework: Finish IC2 outlines and bring to class Monday
<i>Week 15</i>	Apr 15/17	M:	In-class Essay 2
		W:	In-class Essay 2 (cont. for L2 students)
<i>Week 16</i>	Apr 22/24	M:	In-class Essay 2 results/course averages Exit Writing Sample Topics Distributed <u>Homework</u> : Complete outlines for Exit Essay topics and bring to class Monday
		W:	Exit Writing Sample
<i>Week 17</i>	Apr 29/May 1	M:	Exit Writing Sample (cont. for L2 students) COMPASS Review for L1 students
		W:	COMPASS Review (cont.)
<b>COMPASS Exam: Thursday, May 2 (Retest May 3)</b>			