

Second Language Writing in Higher Education Contexts: Challenges and Future Promises

This special issue focuses on second language writing in higher education, from community colleges to doctoral settings. It examines a wide range of issues often faced in higher educational settings, from classroom teaching and tutoring to graduate-level challenges. To some, this may seem as attempting to cover a lot of ground, and it probably is a bold attempt. However, second language writing does not always get the needed attention—sometimes because it gets folded under composition and first-year writing, and at other times because it is hard to peel away the many layers of teaching writing that inevitably include all four skills in language teaching.

Therefore, this NYSTJ issue puts forth a bold agenda for reviewing current topics in second language writing (SLW). The field of SLW has grown exponentially since the turn of this century, and it has carved a significant niche for its research agenda. However, it has also fallen prey to faddism—something the field of education has been extremely vulnerable to, and so has the field of writing and composing. SLW came out of first-year writing and composition studies, and because it stems from other fields, it is in a vulnerable position of balancing the fields of language learning and composing—truly very different areas of study.

Thus, in many ways, SLW has been a “follower”—looking to the sister fields of English Composition and First-Year Writing (FYW), extracting relevant theories and adapting them to language teaching needs. This issue is in many ways following the practice of either appropriating educational research and FYW trends and modifying them, or expanding the existing theories of college composition. What the NYSTJ editorial team strived to do is to manage both sides of the spectrum with precision and care: focus on the students and their in- and out-of-class needs, but also provide faculty and teachers with the needed support in the classroom (be it undergraduate or graduate level), so they can be more successful in writing instruction.

In this issue, we highlight two guest authors, Luciana C. de Oliveira and Tanita Saenkhum, each contributing to the discussion of how best to do second language writing and writing support in tertiary levels so that the teachers in training become more successful when they find themselves in the classroom as teachers. De Oliveira explores the potential of second language writing in tertiary education, while Saenkhum’s article is a narrative account of participants’ experiences designing and using an assessment rubric.

In her Brief Report, Lan Wang-Hiles focuses on empowering multilingual writers in tutoring settings by challenging the English-only stance and opening doors for multilingual tutoring centers.

In Alternative Perspectives, Katherine E. Entigar also engages the question of tutoring and sees tutors as advocates for second language writers. Peter Kim proposes a move from a prompt-based to a read-and-response-writing-based pedagogy in ESL.

The Materials Review section features a hot-off-the-press book by Nigel A. Caplan and Ann M. Johns, reviewed by Kamal Belmihoub, that boldly challenges the engrained practices in second language writing

classrooms. The second review, by Jasmin Bey Cowin, examines the value of the simulations teacher training websites—a welcome contribution given the current need to teach and train using remote learning modes and online resources.

The editors hope that NYSTJ readership will be inspired by these original contributions and also encouraged to expand the current vistas of SLW, particularly those readers who are also teaching in tertiary institutions and for whom second language challenges experienced by their undergraduate students are more than a daily reality.

I personally wish to thank all the contributors for their patience during this long process, since the onset of the work on the current issue coincided with the onset of the global COVID pandemic, and we all faced multiple challenges, including our great reviewers, to bring this issue to you—our readers! Special thanks are due to the editorial team and our copyeditor for their excellent work!

Lubie Grujicic-Alatraste
New York City, July 2020

