CROSS-CULTURAL COMPOSITION: MEDIADED INTEGRATION OF US AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Working at the turn of the millennium, writing teachers and writing program administrators are facing, among many others, two important challenges. The first is to provide an appropriate instructional environment for all types of students, as the student population at many university campuses is becoming increasingly diverse and international. According to the Institute of International Education, international student enrollment reached 481,280 in the 1997-98 academic year and is continuing to increase (Desruisseaux A66). At our institution, there are currently 3,266 international visa students, including 1,296 undergraduate students (Patterson 3). About 9% of 35,000 undergraduate and graduate students at our campus are international students, most of whom speak English as a second language (ESL). In addition, there is a growing number of ESL students who are permanent residents or naturalized citizens of the United States. The presence of these ESL students requires special attention from teachers and administrators because, while ESL writers are similar in many ways to their native English speaking (NES) counterparts, there is also a number of significant differences that make working with them challenging for many writing teachers who have traditionally had few opportunities to learn how to teach second language writers.

The second challenge is to provide educational opportunities in which students can prepare themselves for an increasingly internationalized world. In “Fads and Fashions on Campus: Interdisciplinarity and Internationalization,” Craufurd D. Goodwin suggests that almost all college graduates today are required by circumstances

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to understand the world. Whether they become businesspersons, engineers, journalists, public officials, or enter almost any other occupation, they will be faced inevitably over their life spans with a host of people and things that are not American. To the degree that they remain unfamiliar with this "difference," they will be unable to cope. Indeed, recognizing this reality ahead of their teachers, students (both American and foreign) have formed one of the most strenuous forces pressing for the introduction of international material into the curricula of the liberal arts college and the professional schools. They demand that you prepare them for a world they will face that is already highly diverse and is becoming more so. (78)

Compared to the first challenge, the second one may seem less immediate. Nevertheless, it is an important concern for those involved in higher education—including writing teachers and administrators—because, as Goodwin points out, "so many of the problems that we face today within the United States are multinational in their origin and solution," and "if we are to attack these problems through research, and as citizens, we must understand other places and other peoples" (78).

One of the ways in which we have responded to these challenges is to offer what we call a cross-cultural composition course, which is designed to integrate US and international students and is taught by an instructor who is prepared to address the needs of both groups of students.2 Our goal in this essay is to consider this cross-cultural composition course as an alternative placement option that can provide an effective learning environment for ESL writers as well as a way of promoting international and intercultural understanding for both US and international students.

Cross-Cultural Composition as a Placement Option

One of the most important reasons for creating our cross-cultural composition course is to offer an environment which is less threatening to ESL writers than existing placement options while providing an optimal learning opportunity for all students involved. Traditionally, the discussion of placement options for ESL students has often been cast in terms of the binary opposition between "mainstreaming" and "segregation" of ESL writers—that is, either integrating ESL students into "regular" first-year composition or basic writing courses, which are designed primarily for students who are proficient in spoken English (Roy, "Aliance," "ESL"), or separating them into special ESL sections of composition courses with or without credit (Braine; Nattinger). Although both approaches have some advantages, each of them falls short of providing for the needs of ESL writers in different ways.
(For a comprehensive overview of placement options, see Silva, "An Examination.")

From the perspective of the administrator, integrating ESL writers into existing writing courses, including both mainstream sections of composition and basic writing, has a definite economic advantage. These courses require no additional resources for developing a new program, for hiring or preparing ESL writing teachers, or for administering a new program. From the perspective of ESL writers, however, it is essentially a sink-or-swim approach. Some students fare well in this situation or may even enjoy the challenge; to others, however, it means “farewell”—many students withdraw from these courses or receive failing grades.

Some ESL students tend not to do well in mainstream courses partly because many of them feel intimidated by their NES peers who are obviously more proficient in English and comfortable with the US classroom culture. In an examination of students’ attitudes toward and their performance in ESL and mainstream sections of an introductory composition course, Braine reported that students “expressed their fear and embarrassment about speaking up in mainstream classes” (100). That is, some ESL students were not able to ask questions or participate in discussions as fully as they wished to because they anticipated negative reactions from their classmates and teachers. The problem, however, was not all in ESL students’ heads; the lack of awareness and sensitivity towards their needs among some NES students and teachers also added to the difficulty that ESL students faced. Braine found that the ESL students in his study often withdrew from mainstream classes because they “did not feel ‘comfortable’”:

Many [ESL] students stated, generally, the [NES] 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 students felt that the [NES] students were impatient with them, and one [ESL] student said that he overheard a [NES] student complain to the teacher about her inability to correct the numerous grammatical errors in [the ESL student’s] paper. (98)

In an ethnographic study of ESL high school students, Harklau also observed that class discussion in the mainstream classroom may be dominated by NES students. ESL writers are often silenced not only because of their language difficulties, but because of negative reactions from both the teacher and NES classmates who may be oblivious to their special needs. Integrating ESL students into mainstream courses could be more appropriate if all composition teachers were prepared to teach ESL writing; however, as many ESL specialists have pointed out, teachers of mainstream classes in many cases are

A common solution to this problem is to create ESL sections of the composition course. In Braine’s study, a majority of the ESL students who enrolled in a mainstream section of the first-semester composition course indicated that they would have preferred to have taken ESL sections while 95% of ESL students who took ESL sections of first-semester composition were satisfied with the course. Most of the students in the study explained that they felt “‘comfortable’ or ‘at ease’ in the ESL classes.” One of the reasons for students’ preference for ESL composition was that it did not make ESL students feel “self-conscious of their accents,” thus allowing them to have “more confidence to ask questions of the teacher and to take part in class discussions” (97).

ESL sections of composition courses are not without their problems, however. Because students in ESL composition courses are segregated from the rest of the campus community on the basis of their linguistic backgrounds, some faculty may see the course as remedial and thus somehow less rigorous than the “regular” composition course. Similarly, ESL students may come into the ESL composition course with the expectation that, because it is designed specifically for ESL students, it is somehow “easier” than “regular” sections of composition courses. Some advanced ESL students may also feel that ESL sections do not provide a sufficient challenge, although ESL sections are often as demanding as, if not more demanding than, “mainstream” sections of composition courses. Another limitation of ESL composition is that it does not provide ESL students with the opportunity to work with NES writers. Preparing ESL students to work with NES writers is important because, once they complete the composition requirement, they will no longer have the luxury of being in an ESL section of, for instance, a history or sociology course. They must eventually face the challenge of working—and in some cases competing—with their NES peers. However, courses that separate ESL students may not be able to prepare them sufficiently in this respect. An alternative to this integration/separation binary is to provide a mediated integration of NES and ESL writers, and the cross-cultural composition course can be a way of accomplishing this goal. Unlike mainstream writing courses, cross-cultural composition courses can create an ESL-friendly learning environment both because ESL students are no longer minorities in the classroom and because the teacher is prepared to work with both NES and ESL writers. Being ESL-friendly, however, does not necessarily mean being conflict-free. Rather, the cross-cultural composition course creates what Mary Louis Pratt calls “contact zones,” or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of
highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34) because it encourages ESL students as well as NES students to foreground difference in order to explore the “ground rules for communication across lines of difference and hierarchy that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect” (40). In other words, it can create a “shared discourse community” (Matsuda, “Contrastive Rhetoric” 54) within which ESL students can openly negotiate how they relate to NES students rather than hide behind the comfort of ESL sections or conceal their cultural and linguistic backgrounds in an effort to conform to the expectations of teachers and students in mainstream courses. Furthermore, by deliberately integrating NES and ESL students, this course also allows them to see one another as “complementary resources” (Healy and Hall 21; see also Patthey-Chavez and Gergen; Silva “Examination”).

In the next section, we will consider these claims by describing a section of the cross-cultural composition course taught at Purdue University during the Fall semester of 1997. Our goal in describing the projects and activities is not to prescribe a pedagogical package to be adopted uncritically; rather, we hope to illustrate how this placement option might work and to offer examples of pedagogical strategies that are designed to help students critically reflect on the implications of linguistic and cultural diversity.

A Cross-Cultural Composition Course

At Purdue University, the cross-cultural composition course is offered as an equivalent of the first-semester introductory composition course. To achieve a mediated integration of NES and ESL writers, this course is designed to enroll more or less equal numbers of US and international students. The section offered in Fall 1997 consisted of 20 first-year management students—including 8 native and 12 non-native speakers of English—who signed up voluntarily in consultation with their academic advisors. The group included 14 males and 6 females and represented a range of linguistic and cultural groups. Students came from various native-language backgrounds, including English (10), Hindi (1), Indonesian (5), Korean (2), Pakistani (1), and Spanish (1). The group included two Indian students who had a strong background in the English language; one of them was a permanent resident of the United States who was raised in a suburb of New York City, and the other, a British national, had graduated from a US high school. One of the Korean students also was a graduate of a US high school. Most of the US citizens—with the exception of the Hispanic student from Puerto Rico—said they came from relatively small Indiana communities, where “multiculturalism did not exist” (Nicole, Reflective Commentary, December 12).

Since its inception in 1993, the cross-cultural composition course has been staffed by instructors with theoretical and practical preparation in
teaching ESL and writing as well as experience in teaching both ESL and mainstream sections of introductory composition courses. (See Reichelt and Silva for a description of the genesis of the course.) The syllabus and course projects are designed by individual instructors so that their interests, experience, and areas of expertise are reflected in the way the course is taught. The instructor for the Fall 1997 section was Paul Matsuda, a non-native speaker of English who had previously taught cross-cultural communication and foreign language courses. Consequently, he developed writing projects that were designed to focus more explicitly on cross-cultural issues than did his predecessors. Rather than seeing the cross-cultural component merely as a “dividend” (Silva, “Examination” 40), Paul made it a central focus of the course by developing writing projects in which students inquired into cross-cultural issues.

Writing Projects and Activities

Writing tasks for this section included weekly journals and five major writing projects. One of the elements that seemed to contribute to the success of this class was the cross-cultural journal, which has always been a key element of the course. Each week, students submitted a one- or two-page journal entry, in which they described and reflected on their cross-cultural experiences. From the students’ perspective, this activity served at least three purposes. First, it provided a way of reflecting on thoughts and experiences related to cross-cultural communication. Second, students used the journal as a way of communicating insights—gained through in- or out-of-class cross-cultural interactions and experiences—to the instructor and their classmates. Third, it served as an invention heuristic; that is, it allowed students to record their reactions to certain issues for later reflection and development in one of the writing projects. From Paul’s perspective, the activity provided a way of understanding students’ levels of cross-cultural awareness and development as well as an opportunity to provide comments to encourage further reflection.

When the semester started, most of the students—both US and international—seemed to be relatively unaware of the importance of cultural differences and their implications for communication and cross-cultural understanding. For this reason, discussions in the course during the first few weeks focused on raising awareness of cultural differences, allowing students to generate significant understanding of other cultures and accepting their practices before judging them. The first writing project, a cultural profile, was designed to facilitate this process. In this project, students were first asked to form groups of three, with each student representing a different cultural group. They then interviewed one another to learn as much as they could about cultural practices that were different from their own. Students
were asked specifically to identify those practices that involved “dissonance” (Lauer 91) or “productive conflict” (Jarratt 118), which served as starting points of inquiry. Some examples of the cultural practices students discussed were arranged marriage in countries such as India and Japan, the status of women in Indonesia, and the use of physical punishment by teachers in Korea. After identifying dissonance, students interviewed each other further to develop a better understanding of the cultural practice in its broader social and cultural contexts. Based on their interviews, each student wrote an exploratory essay and made a brief oral presentation to share the insights gained through this project.

The second project focused on an aspect of cross-cultural communication that is important but often overlooked: nonverbal communication. To understand how different cultural groups used and interpreted nonverbal cues, students observed interactions among a group of people with similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For this project, students were asked to find a partner who came from a background that was different from her or his own. There were four reasons for making this project a collaborative one. First, it would provide students an opportunity to get to know someone from another linguistic or cultural background well. Another reason was that it would allow students to learn from each other’s style and process of writing. The third reason was to provide students with an opportunity to experience the complexity of co-authorship and to reflect on the subject position of the author/researcher. The fourth, and most important, reason was that it would help students to contribute different perspectives on what they observed. For example, Nathan, a US student, and Stephanie, an Indonesian student, observed a group of Indonesian students meeting regularly for lunch in the student union. Since Nathan did not understand the Indonesian language, he concentrated on describing nonverbal behavior—which was more transparent to the Indonesian student—while Stephanie acted as a cultural informant. In the texts that were produced collaboratively, students described various uses of nonverbal behavior and discussed their significance. Once again, insights from the observation project were shared through oral presentations, which were more formal than those for the previous project.

The third project involved survey research. By the time the second project was completed, students had become aware of many cross-cultural issues that affected them in significant ways. For instance, some students began to discuss issues such as the forming of racial cliques and the international students’ participation in discussions and activities in various classes. One of the most interesting discussions was about international students’ use of their first language in the presence of students from other linguistic backgrounds. Through journal sharing and in-class discussions,
students found that there were various views as to whether speaking a language in front of people who did not understand it was appropriate and how often and why it occurred. To answer some of the questions that arose from these discussions, students conducted surveys. At the beginning, Priya, an ESL student from India with a strong English background, insisted that international students should try to speak English when they are in the United States. To understand why ESL students speak their native language in public, she proposed to survey bilingual international students. In her research, Priya found out that international students “do not choose to speak their native language” but “only use it out of necessity; when speaking English becomes difficult” (Priya, Project 3, Evaluation Version, October 29). This research helped to change her attitude, as she later wrote:

When I hear a group of students speaking another language, it does not bother me as much as it did before. I realize now why they do it and how hard it is for them to always speak English and still send a clear message. (Priya, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

She was not the only one who was affected by this research. It also helped NES students to understand the difficulty that ESL students experienced and caused ESL students to realize the implications of speaking their native language in public.

Through the first three writing projects as well as class discussions, students had gained many valuable insights into cross-cultural communication. In the fourth project, students were asked to share those insights with people outside of the classroom community. The main goal of this project was to help students to become sensitive to the use of genre and audience in constructing arguments. To identify a viable topic, students reviewed all of their journal entries and writing projects, highlighting parts of the text that seemed promising. A few students chose to write flyers for bulletin boards and room doors in the residence hall, but most of them wrote letters to the editor of the campus newspaper, two of which were published.

For the final project, students were asked to demonstrate their development as writers and cross-cultural communicators by compiling a cross-cultural portfolio. The cross-cultural portfolio consisted of a cover letter, revisions of two of the writing projects, all versions of all writing projects (as well as written feedback from the instructor and classmates), all journal entries, and a reflective commentary. The last item, the reflective commentary, was the most challenging part of this project. Students were asked to demonstrate what they had learned by describing it or by referring to specific parts of their texts. For students, it provided an incentive for reviewing their work and for reflecting on their accomplishments. For Paul, it was a way of assessing students’ work as well as the effectiveness of the course in addressing students’ needs as writers and cross-cultural
communicators. What follows is a consideration, based on students’ perceptions, of the course’s effectiveness in providing an ESL-friendly environment as well as in promoting cross-cultural learning.

An ESL-Friendly Environment

At the beginning of the semester, Park, a student from Korea, approached Paul Matsuda, the instructor, to ask whether it would be possible to do well in a class with so many NES students. In his reflective commentary, which was written at the end of the semester, Park reflected on his initial concerns:

I was always worried about how I can get a good grade in the English course because I should study English with American students. Obviously, they speak and write better than I do. This fact really has depressed me. (Park, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

Park was not alone with this concern. Lia, an Indonesian student, wrote that she was “worried and afraid” when she came into the class on the first day: “Worried because I thought that I could not follow the class, and afraid because I was in the class of so many Americans with their ability in writing” (Lia, Reflective Commentary, December 12).

These comments resemble those made by ESL students who were enrolled in mainstream composition courses in Braine’s study. As the semester progressed, however, students in the cross-cultural composition course were able to overcome the initial fear of being in the same class with NES students. Three weeks into the course, Stephanie, another student from Indonesia, explained in her journal how activities in the course were helping her to become more comfortable in working with other students:

Things are getting better now. It is hardly that I can not understand what other people say. Although there are still some troubles on speaking and understanding other people, it surely is getting better. These week we talked and interviewed friends in class in order to get to know each other better. . . . What we’ve done is one way to make the class get to know each other, understand who your friends are, how they’d like to be treated. I am surely going to like this class. (Stephanie, Journal #2, September 12)

Lia also indicated in her reflective commentary that she became increasingly comfortable as a result of class interactions: “As soon as I knew my friends [in this class], I became more and more confident in expressing my thought, whether through my writing, or in front of the whole class.” She attributed these changes to “the class’s environment and atmosphere” which “helped us a lot in interacting with other students.” She explained:

The teacher gives us a freedom to utter our feeling and thoughts
about things that are discussed in class. This is especially important for me because I am not used to expressing my feelings in front of the class. (Lia, Reflective Commentary, December 12) Park also learned to turn his initial anxiety into a productive tension, which enabled him to learn from his US classmates:

... as time went by, I figured out that only the progress of English skill does not mean everything in the course. It means, I should acquire the writing skill that can be understood by Americans. Therefore, I should get the feedback from American students. Even though I can write well in Korean, Americans sometimes cannot understand my paper. So, I have tried to read paper of other American classmates so that I can understand their culture and thoughts. (Park, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

Although Park learned to cope with his US classmates, he was not as successful in speaking up in class as Lia. In his own words: “one thing that I did not do well in this course is that I did not speak up in class. I need to talk with other students to share opinions” (Park, Reflective Commentary, December 12). However, he did speak up in class occasionally, and when he shared his thoughts on the difficulty of speaking a second language, other students were supportive. One of the US students, Dave, even wrote an extensive response in his journal, which he read to the class:

Park said that he had trouble communicating with Americans and did not participate much in many of his classes. At first he thought that it was the Americans’ fault. He thought that the Americans did not want to communicate with him because of his nationality, and they would make fun of him if he tried to explain his thoughts during a class discussion. But then he made a statement that I had never really thought about, but I agreed with it 100 percent. He said that it was not the Americans’ fault; he needed to put the blame on himself.

I think this is a great realization, and this hold very true with college freshman, no matter what country you are from. Often times Americans even feel uncomfortable talking to international students. They do not feel superior to international students, they just feel as if international students might not care what they think or might not fully understand them. But what everyone needs to realize is that everyone else is basically in the same boat. We are all experiencing a very new and exciting experience in our lives. So I think a great place to start would be for all of us to take a look in the mirror and think to ourselves, “Maybe this is where the problem begins.” Yes, some American students do make an effort to talk to international students, and some international students do
make an effort to talk to American students. But when it is all laid out on the table, most nationalities are intimidated to talk to someone outside of their own cultural background. So my main point of this journal is that I think we would all get along much better if we stopped blaming others for the lack of communication, and started blaming ourselves. (Dave, Journal #8, October 27)

Park’s initial contribution as well as Dave’s response contributed to a better understanding of different perspectives that US and international students brought to the classroom on this issue. It also helped the members of the class to construct new insights into the bilateral nature of cross-cultural communication. The opportunity to gain this kind of cultural insight is another unique advantage of the cross-cultural composition course.

Opportunities for Cross-Cultural Learning

The dialogue between Park and Dave, which helped to heighten students’ cross-cultural awareness, is but one example of how this course can help to promote international understanding, as Nathan, a US student, observed:

It seemed that everyone became more conscious [of cultural issues] as our class advanced to greater levels in our writing projects. . . . People in class began to understand the feelings and views of each other from the start of the class and have been analyzing these issues ever since. (Nathan, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

In fact, students came to regard the cross-cultural component of this course to be a valuable part of their educational experience. Dave wrote, for instance: “This class has definitely enhanced my writing ability, but I do not think that was the greatest benefit I have received from this class.”

The greatest benefit I received from this course was indeed being educated to be a cross-cultural communicator. I come from a fairly small town and a very small High School. Students with different cultural backgrounds really did not exist. I had never thought about what it would be like to be in a strange country, away from your friends and family, and not knowing the cultural norms of the people around you. But now I have worked in groups with international students, one-on-one with international students, and just socially interacted with international students. I have realized that after I put our cultural differences aside, it is actually quite easy for me to communicate with international students. (Dave, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

Jenny, who at the beginning of the semester was “very unsure about this class” because she had “never had an opportunity or option to associate with
international students," came to enjoy working with international students. As she wrote:

    Not only have I learned a lot in this class but this class has also helped me to correspond and befriend many international students. I not only have been given a chance to converse with international students but I have also learned a lot about many different cultures. (Jenny, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

For project 4, in which students were asked to share their insights in a public forum, Ryan, another US student, chose to write a letter to the editor of the campus newspaper arguing that a "multi-cultural class" such as cross-cultural composition should be required for all students. In this letter, which was later published, he wrote: "Once I was there I quickly realized that it was even more different than I had expected. Suddenly, I felt as if I were in another country. I was the minority." He continued:

    I have never been in a situation where I was outnumbered by people from another race. This class makes one stop to think about how he or she treats minorities. It also helps American students to realize how it would feel to be studying in a foreign country. (Ryan, Project #4, Evaluation Version, November 17)

These students from small Indiana communities were not the only ones who saw the benefit of cross-cultural interactions, as Ramya, an Indian student from New York, suggests:

    I am originally from a suburb right outside of what is probably the most culturally diverse city in the world, New York City. So what could I possibly learn from a group of international students and a group of freshmen from Midwest? I'm sure they would have some good insight, but nothing I haven't heard before, right? I was totally wrong. (Ramya, Reflective Commentary, December 12)

Likewise, international students who were experiencing cross-cultural communication on a daily basis were also able to gain some useful cross-cultural insights from this course.

    Then I met friends in my English class and we discussed some cultural differences that we have. That was fun. It is interesting to know that there are other ways of life, they have positive facts that I should consider, beside all the way of life that I have right now. By getting to know other cultures, I can have more respect to other people because now I can understand who they are and the cultural background that they grew up with. (Stephanie, Journal #1, September 5)

As students' comments indicate, this course was able to meet the goal of providing a learning environment where ESL students can feel comfortable
and where all types of students can increase their cross-cultural awareness. To borrow Jenny’s words, “this class [was] a benefit to all who enrolled in it” (Jenny, Reflective Commentary, December 12).

Implementing Cross-Cultural Composition

As we have suggested, the mediated integration of US and international students in a cross-cultural composition course can be an effective way of addressing the needs of both NES and ESL students. To develop cross-cultural composition courses successfully, two issues need to be addressed: staffing and the placement procedure.

First, to provide effective instruction for both US and international students, the cross-cultural composition course should be taught by an instructor who is prepared to work with both NES and ESL writers. At Purdue, we are fortunate to have a pool of instructors who meet these criteria because our department offers graduate programs in both Rhetoric and Composition and Second Language Studies. In many cases, however, it is difficult to find instructors who have backgrounds in both first- and second-language writing because these two professions have traditionally been separated institutionally (Matsuda, “Composition,” “Situating”). Composition teachers who are interested in teaching this course might wish to familiarize themselves with issues surrounding second language writing by attending presentations and workshops on ESL writing at CCCC or by reading introductory textbooks for ESL writing teachers such as Dana Ferris and John Hedgcock’s *Teaching ESL Composition* and Ilona Leki’s *Understanding ESL Writers*. Alternatively, the course can be team taught by one instructor with a background in composition and another with an ESL background. Having instructors from two different professional backgrounds can help to ensure that the course is informed by developments in both fields. In addition, it can provide an opportunity for teachers to enhance their professional preparation through collaboration. The team teaching approach can be further strengthened by having one native and one non-native speaker of English because they tend to have different strengths and perspectives that can complement one another.

Second, to maintain a balanced enrollment of the two types of students, a special placement procedure may need to be established. As Reichelt and Silva have described, the initial attempt to offer this course in Spring 1993 was unsuccessful because, although letters were sent out to faculty advisors from various departments in the previous Fall, not enough students signed up to justify a section. However, the School of Management saw cross-cultural composition as a way of increasing cross-cultural awareness and expressed their interest in the course for some of their students during the following
semester. For this reason, placement of students into cross-cultural composition is coordinated by academic advisors in the School of Management and is currently designated for management students only.

Our experience suggests that the cross-cultural aspect of this placement option can be especially valuable at institutions where linguistic and cultural diversity is not prevalent. At some institutions, where the student population is already diverse, it may not be necessary to integrate students by creating a special placement option. Yet, even in those cases, some of the projects that we have discussed here may be useful. By foregrounding cross-cultural issues in the classroom, teachers can help already culturally-aware students to further develop their cross-cultural understanding, as Ramya’s comments quoted earlier suggest. In emphasizing the benefits of cross-cultural composition over other options, however, we do not mean to suggest that it should replace other placement options completely. Since some students may prefer mainstream or ESL sections, cross-cultural composition should be offered as an alternative option.

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Notes

1 Ilona Leki’s Understanding ESL Writers provides a useful overview of characteristics of ESL writers for writing teachers. For a systematic review of the distinct nature of second language writing, see Silva, “Toward,” “Differences.”

2 In this article, we define US students as US-born students as well as naturalized citizens and permanent residents of the United States. The term international students refers to non-US citizens who are on student visas. In the context of our institution, this distinction generally coincides with the ESL/DES distinction; however, it is important to note that some US students are ESL writers and that some international students are NES students.

3 All student names in this article are pseudonyms. Student texts quoted here come from the Fall 1997 section of the cross-cultural composition course and are unedited. The sources of student texts (indicated in parentheses) include weekly journal entries and writing projects as well as reflective commentaries, in which students considered their development as writers and cross-cultural communicators.

Works Cited


