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When I started my graduate studies in Composition and TESOL at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) in 2006, I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I immersed myself into the interdisciplinary field of Composition Studies and teaching English as a second/foreign language (TESL/TEFL). With my teaching experiences from Thailand, my focal interests resided around second language (L2) writing. It was my first time hearing such terms as L2 writing, world Englishes, composition, and applied linguistics. As I navigated national and international conferences, I often attended L2 writing-related sessions, as they were a part of my academic scholarship. I often left those conferences thinking of ways to address issues of teaching L2 writers from both theoretical and pedagogical perspectives. I was delighted to see and have an opportunity to review Redesigning Composition for Multilingual Realities as I believe this is a long overdue book for the field of rhetoric and composition.

Working from different fields such as rhetoric and composition, applied linguistics, Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language (TESL/TEFL), and World Englishes, Jordan complicates the term “composition” or “comp” (20). In the introduction, the author suggests the this book is an attempt to continue conversations in teaching, researching, and working with multilingual writers through “advance[d] cross-disciplinary understandings of multilingualism” (4) to better inform pedagogy. The introduction chapter orients readers by defining relevant terms, such as “English” (7), “users” (12), and “composition” (15) that the author will refer to in the following chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the concept of “compensation” (25) from writing center scholarship. The writing center is a site where multilingual writers seek advice from tutors on their drafts; it is also where multilingual writers negotiate their agencies with tutors. Writing centers are often perceived as fix-it shops for instructors in different disciplines. Through the lenses of “communities of practice” (see Wenger) and Students’ Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL), multilingual writers are often seen to be novices in composing their written assignments with dialects which are viewed as illegitimate discourses from their instructors. Instead of tutors looking at these dialects as illegitimate, the author proposes that writing center pedagogies and tutoring practices should be spaces where multilingual writers learn to socialize, negotiate, and accommodate their language uses in academic genres.

In chapter 2, the term “competence” (50) is discussed from TESL/TEFL and applied linguistics perspectives. The author synthesizes research from
various disciplines and analyzes field notes he has collected from his own studies. Jordan emphasizes that by privileging one variety of English over another, we run the risk of thinking English is a static entity that cannot be changed, which will only be detrimental to multilingual writers. Composition Studies cannot ignore the fact that multilingual writers bring with them multiple competences or literacies to our classrooms. Different communicative competencies—grammatical knowledge, language creativity, cross-cultural background, and negotiating strategies—that these writers bring should be explored through observation during classroom interactions that they have with other students. The author encourages other compositionists to observe these competencies in their classrooms as the discovery of these aspects is rewarding to both students and teachers. Such pedagogical practices are discussed in the following chapters.

“Composition” (85) is the focal discussion in chapter 3. This short chapter describes a cross-cultural composition course that Jordan and his colleague piloted in 2004. The author describes the process of linking two composition classes—one section of mainstream and one section of multilingual writers. Jordan lays out the whole process of the course with some critical reflective remarks. For example, he points out challenges in creating this particular course such as technical difficulties in linking two courses together, as well as time constraints because the two classes were taught by different faculty members. The awareness of students from both classes is positive in that students learn about multicultural issues and challenges. Jordan proposes that composition courses should move towards the framework of intercultural practices by either connecting, mixing, or allowing mainstream students and multilingual students to comment, interact, and discuss their writing assignments together to maximize multilingual students’ competencies that they bring into our classrooms.

The last chapter focuses on the concept of “intercultural composition” (119). While the author promises that he will not provide any cookie cutter pedagogies at the beginning of the book, he does suggest some key changes in Composition Studies at the curricular level. Conducting needs analysis and surveying students are suggested as places to start the revision of curricula. Jordan suggests assigning culture-related writing projects and scaffolding peer feedback, as both help multilingual writers gain agency and negotiate their sense of selves in their written works. Based on activities like asking students to write about meta-discourse awareness, producing narratives based on their experiences of language, and the using of “realia” (133) or real life tools and materials, as well as portfolios (136), the author emphasizes that curricula and teachers should ask multilingual students to share their lives, experiences, and competencies.

Redesigning Composition for Multilingual Realities is an attempt to challenge the idealized Standard Written English and promote interdisciplinary research and scholarship from L2 writing, applied linguistics, World Englishes, rhetoric and composition, and literary studies. The book refers
to useful and seminal works of each field. New graduate students and compositionists may find this book to be dense and jargonized. However, the book is accessible for those who are interested in intercultural communication. I would like to praise the author in his attempt not to provide any pedagogical implications to readers because we all know that the context of each classroom plays an important factor in (re)designing any composition course to focus on (critical) reflections of language learning experiences. That being said, some pedagogical practices and strategies can be found throughout the book. More importantly, the author attempts to promote the neglected and undervalued personal experiences that multilingual writers bring into our classrooms. As a composition instructor and an L2 writer who values students' personal histories and backgrounds, this book provides a refreshing voice to hear. The insightfulness of this book will become a valuable resource for WPA, composition scholars, L2 writing scholars, TESOL educators, and graduate students.

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Works Cited