Broadening the Circle: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Writers in the Writing Center

Chaired by: Kathryn Nielsen Dube & Helena Hall, Loras College
Session Coordinator: Angela Dadak, American University

Agenda

Introductions and Announcements

☞ “Using Student Experiences and Concepts from Applied Linguistics to Inform Our Thinking About CLD Students in the Writing Center” led by Shanti Bruce & Ben Rafoth

☞ Inkshedding and Table discussions

☞ Coffee break – Will be Announced (roughly 2:30)

☞ Roundtable Session Part I

☞ Roundtable Session Part II

Choice of Roundtables for both Sections:

♦ Roundtable 1: Writing Centers, CLD Students, and Interdisciplinary Relations: (Re) Shaping the Culture on our Campuses led by Kathryn Nielsen Dube

♦ Roundtable 2: Training Writing Center Tutors to Work with CLD Writers led by Helena Hall & Gigi Taylor

♦ Roundtable 3: Appropriation, CLD, and the Writing Center led by Angela Dadak

♦ Roundtable 4: Rethinking the Native Speaker Norm: Learning from CLD Students & Tutors led by Haivan Hoang, Christopher DiBiase, and Lisha Daniels Storey

☞ Wrap up Discussion

☞ Feedback Forms & Farewell
Workshop Leaders

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Using Student Experiences to Inform Our Thinking About Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in the Writing Center

The writing center is often thought of as a microcosm of the university, a place where the diversity of students and disciplines on campus comeling. This can be exciting, but it can also be daunting for tutors who are asked to move seamlessly from one session to the next helping students who come to them with a variety of previous writing experiences. Learning about some of these experiences may provide tutors with a better understanding of the people they are encountering in each session and how best to meet their needs.

What kinds of experiences with writing do CLD students have before coming to college, whether from various experiences in the U.S. school system or from education systems in other countries? Prior to meeting with a tutor in a writing center, CLD students have had varied experiences with writing. To make discussions of these experiences manageable, breaking them into categories is necessary, but how to do that is problematic. Ilona Leki (2009) acknowledges this difficulty and offers three categories that can be used to facilitate these discussions.

1. Undergraduate students who graduated from U.S. high schools – These students may have oral fluency, back channeling proficiency, and act and dress like their domestic peers. They may come to the writing center with issues similar to that of their domestic peers, such as needing to learn to quote and paraphrase correctly, and because of this, tutors may find it easier to work with them than with international students. Leki says these students may not be willing to or know how to evolve their writing skills beyond what they learned to get by with in high school.

2. International or visa undergraduates who expect to return to their countries after their education – Leki explains that the focus on teaching writing is not always present in other countries the way it is in the U.S. Some students in European and Asian countries are taught to write in English, and they often learn that English writing is a rigid, formulaic style, similar to the five paragraph essay. Some students come from cultures that mainly emphasize writing for essay exams, and grammatical correctness is highly valued. These students may not have encountered the concept of writing for a specific audience.

3. International graduate students or professionals – Some international graduate students may have highly developed disciplinary knowledge, but Leki explains, they might have “the most basic and generalized L2 writing instruction . . . on generic essay writing typical of, for example, undergraduate essay exams or certain types of first-year writing courses” (p. 10-11). Some international graduate students may not have studied English recently, and others are quite the opposite. Some students “not only come with experience writing in their disciplines in their first language but also read a great deal professionally and often in English” (p. 11). Some graduate students are esteemed professionals in their home countries and find it frustrating to be in the situation of having to be tutored.

Within these broad strokes are individuals, all with their own stories and unique experiences. Here are a few:

I met Lucas at St. Thomas University in Miami where he was working as a writing center tutor. He was born in Argentina and came to the U.S. at 15 years old. In Argentina, he took English courses that focused solely on grammar rules. In the U.S., he was placed in ESL classes. He found them to be boring because they focused on grammar rules he already knew. He happened to enroll in a creative writing course, and because of this experience, he fell in love with writing. The opportunity to write creatively sparked his interest and inspired him to work hard so that he could eventually take an AP English course. Now, he is an undergraduate writing center tutor.

Zhao (2003) recounts the story of Patricia who moved to the U.S. at 18 years old and one month shy of graduating high school in her home country, the Dominican Republic. She had earned high grades at home, but in her New York high school, Patricia possessed the least amount of English. She spent her time in this high school copying down words the teacher wrote on the board, trying to build a vocabulary.
Kanno and Applebaum (1995) shared the experiences of three Japanese students who moved to Toronto high schools as visiting international students. Ritsuko recalled feeling “trapped” (p.36) in ESL classes because she had wanted to brush up on her English but could not move out of the classes once she became entrenched in them. The students in her ESL classes had little interaction with students in other classes, so according to Ritsuko, she did not learn as much as she should have. Saori recalled her ESL courses as places where students played games and were not prepared to move into mainstream courses. Kento was an athlete, and this helped him become accepted by students and teachers. Kento said everyone became so fond of him that they overlooked his issues with writing and did not challenge him to progress beyond an elementary level.

Gerd Brauer (2009) talks specifically about university students in Germany and explains that “only about 5 percent of the student population participates” (p. 189) in writing process focused workshops. He says students in Germany and in many other countries use writing only as a means of “reproducing knowledge, excluding the other functions of writing such as the reflection, transformation, and development of knowledge” (p. 189).

**What do CLD writers say about their writing center experiences?**

While it is important to learn about the variety of writing experiences students have had before they enter our writing centers, it is also helpful to learn what they are experiencing as students in our writing centers. One of my most rewarding research experiences involved talking directly with culturally and linguistically diverse students about their writing center experiences. Kanno and Applebaum (1995) believe “not enough student voice is reflected in the discussion of ESL education” (p. 32), and Early (1992) says “ESL students' perceptions of their educational experiences are an enormously rich, untapped source of data” (p. 274).

During my conversations (Bruce 2009), I learned from Sami (Saudi Arabia) that he was uncomfortable visiting the writing center because the tutoring took place in an open setting where everyone could see that he needed help. I learned from Jung-jun (Korea) that she felt awkward sharing her work with a classmate, that she was bothered when a tutor tried to explain that the center doesn’t just “check grammar,” and she felt that a tutor wasn’t focused on her writing when he got up in the middle of her session to answer the center’s phone. I learned from Zahara (Uganda) that she loved the writing center and appreciated how they made sure she was really learning by asking her to hold the pen and write notes. I learned from Jane (Taiwan) that she often had trouble remembering what to work on after a session ended, and from Helene (Germany), I learned that she was embarrassed to go to the center because she thought it was for weak students. She said, “I started to feel more comfortable accepting their services when I realized that writing is like any other subject and that not being able to express one’s views clearly through writing is nothing to be ashamed of. . . . It takes work to learn to write, and that is what the writing center is there for” (p. 228).

I encourage everyone to consider ways to see their writing centers through the eyes of their students. One-to-one interviews, focus groups led by tutors, and even pairing peer tutors with students for a series of conversations have the potential to reveal helpful information about how culturally and linguistically diverse students view their writing center experiences. With this information, we can make informed choices about our policies and pedagogy and about how we convey the mission of the center to the students who use it.

References


Concepts from Applied Linguistics for Talking about Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students in the Writing Center

Ben Rafoth (brafoth@iup.edu)

Wonderful things happen in writing centers among culturally and linguistically diverse students, but there are also big challenges to face. Sometimes the diversity of cultures and languages can feel overwhelming. But as Helen Fox tells us in Listening to the World (1994), we can move beyond emotional reactions and toward a deeper understanding of our students and ourselves by talking about cultural differences with our students, tutors, and colleagues. Conversations can be enhanced by vocabularies that introduce or re-acquaint participants with concepts that help us to understand difficult, complex subjects like CLD in the writing center. I’d like to recommend a handful of concepts from applied linguistics that are important for talking about CLD in the writing center. These terms will be useful for the roundtable discussions we’ll have a little later. They are also terms to share with tutors because when we engage tutors with current ideas in our field, they become more thoughtful and adept.

- **What does it feel like to be a linguistic foreigner?** To engage with CLD students, it helps for tutors to have a sense of linguistic foreignness. Having direct personal experience as a linguistic foreigner is one way to know it, but to understand the concept more broadly, we could turn to Suresh Canagarajah (2004), who describes the various positions multilingual writers adopt when they are caught between the conflicting discourses of home and school.

1) **Avoidance**: This is a one-sided move that tacitly defers to the dominant discourse “without sufficient [critical] negotiation with the other discourses one uses” (p. 274).
   Example: The writer listens and nods as the tutor tries to engage.

2) **Accommodation**: This position describes a more conscious internalization (than avoidance) of the dominant discourse (p. 284).
   Example: To overcome the perceived limitations of her limited proficiency in written English, the writer engages the tutor to help her revise organization and grammar in her essay.

3) **Opposition**: Instead of negotiating an independent voice for himself, the writer adopts a univocal discourse based on one strand of the conflicting discourses (p. 284).
   Example: The writer adopts an overly distant and formal tone in response to a casual assignment that asks about a personal experience.

4) **Appropriation**: The writer works his own voice into established discourses in an act of direct resistance (pp. 282, 285).
   Example: Despite knowing how to write a thesis-driven essay, the writer adopts an indirect approach because it is more familiar and comfortable to him.

5) **Transposition**: To adopt this position, the writer develops a “third voice that works against the conflicting discourses and forms a new discourse that transcends the earlier dichotomy” (p. 285).
   Example: Content with his writing style and expression, the writer is interested mainly in the tutor’s response to the ideas in the paper.

In these five positions, we see the concept of linguistic foreigner as a position one takes up with respect to self and others and the discourses between them. For tutors, these positions are one way of thinking and talking with one another about the CLD students they meet in the writing center. More concepts that can inform and enhance tutors’ capacities to learn from and talk with one another about CLD writers....
• Why does interaction in the writing center between people from different cultures often feel so alienating [to them]? (Alienating = unfamiliar, awkward)

Native-speaker  Native speakerism refers to native-speaker privilege (Holliday, 2006). We find it in the writing center when a student insists that only a NES can be his tutor. Perhaps it is an American student who doubts the abilities of a Korean tutor to proofread his paper. Or perhaps it is a Korean student who will settle for only a NES because he wants the English in the paper to be perfect, or as if it were written by a NES. Native speakerism entails not only the quest for perfect English but also various orientations to education and cultural stereotypes.

Comprehensible input  This is something that one-on-one interaction with tutors is great for. In Stephen Krashen’s (1983) model of second language acquisition, comprehensible input refers to what the learner needs in order to learn something new, and what is needed is exposure to input that is just a little bit beyond their current level but still understandable. That means that comprehensible input can be different for each person. Tutors are in a perfect position to adjust their input to the student by speaking slowly and using repetition, paraphrases, gestures, and so on. While this can be great for learning, it can feel strange and awkward, especially for untrained tutors, and for learners who feel exposed by it.

Affective filter  This refers to the writer’s emotional state. If she is stressed or anxious, then her filter will be high and it will be difficult to acquire language. If relaxed and confident, then her filter will be low and acquisition easier (Krashen, 1983). It’s important for tutors to be aware of CLD students’ feelings of foreignness so that they can learn better.

Comprehensible output  An idea developed by Swain and Lapkin (1995) (not Krashen) which says that output can be the impetus to language acquisition. For example, a writer wants to say something but cannot and then modifies his output and learns something about the language (perhaps from the reaction of the listener). Related to noticing.

Noticing  Another cognitive idea with sociocultural implications, noticing says that learners have to notice new features of a language in order to learn them. Noticing something does not mean automatically acquiring it, but it’s a start (Schmidt, 1990). For example, a tutor who raises her finger while the writer is reading aloud is promoting noticing.

Investment  Learners have identities and form relationships, and these are important factors in learning to speak and write. Norton (1997) uses the term “to signal the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language and their sometimes ambivalent desire to learn and practice it” (411). A learner who is homesick for his family in Korea may feel little sense of investment in learning to write in English with his tutor.

References
Each paragraph below is the introduction to an argument essay, with all three coming from students’ first drafts. Rank them from best to worst. Be prepared to explain the rationale for your ranking and how you would respond to each student’s draft.

A. Conventionally all mothers are full-time homemakers and only do other work in or near their home so that their child will never out of sight. But around 7 decades ago, women including mothers in European country start entered the workforce together with men. Today, due to the high living cost especially in big cities, it is common to see mother working whether as a teachers, doctors or even engineers! Their contribution to the world should not be a question anymore. By the end of 20th century there are a lot of women right movement give supports to working women. However, there are also people oppose working mothers. One of their points is that working mothers will leave negative effect to the children. Is it true? Some people also argue the ability of mother who entered workforce. I at first also think that mothers are better not to work but after doing some research by interviewing and reading articles about my mother I changed my mind.

B. As you have noticed, gas prices are sharply rising which are partly, results of fossil fuels are running out. Along with that, pollution is on the rise and so are the global temperatures. The pollution is especially worse around metropolitan cities like Tokyo, Calcutta, Los Angeles, Mexico city and many other big cities. All these are results of poisonous gasses, land fills or garbage dumping, and sewage produced from different sources. Cars are one of the major sources of pollution. There are many alternate options already present and some of them are hybrid, electric, solar and fuel cell cars. I have done a lot of research on the future of automobiles and have interviewed a professor on fuel cells. I am also interested in cars and have been around them for a long time and know how they work.

C. Since the early twentieth century, with the discovery of DNA (the genetic material of all cellular organisms and most viruses), there has been an increasing interest in genetic research. Today, about a century later, we have seen how far that research has gone and the results that come with it. Scientists, law enforcement agencies, and medical practitioners have all harnessed the potentials of these breakthroughs in a way or another; improved medical treatments, better efficiency in the field of forensics, and a better understanding of our biological self, to name a few. One of genetics latest advancements was the completion of the Human Genome Project in the year 2003, which arrived at what can be said as the right time since new diseases have been plaguing the population during the recent years. Full of promises and at the same time faced with many setbacks, the Human Genome Project has become the starting point of my research on the field of genomics and the issues that surrounds it. Having an interest in this field, and an invaluable personal experience- as I am suffering from genetic disease- I have read through articles and interviewed a qualified expert to perhaps answer the common question about genetics, “Should the research on genetics be worthy of our focus for the betterment of our future?”

**The Be Patterns**

1. **Subject** Be **Adverbial**
   - *My friends* are *in the library.*
   - *The rehearsal* is *tomorrow.*

2. **Subject** Be **Subjective Complement**
   - *Gino’s father* is *a pilot.* (noun phrase)
   - *This soup* is *salty.* (adjective)

**The Linking Verb Pattern**

3. **Subject** Linking Verb **Subjective Complement**
   - *She and I* became *good friends.*

**The Intransitive Verb Pattern**

4. **Subject** Intransitive Verb **(Optional Complement)**
   - *The whole class* complained *(to no avail).*
   - *The baby* is *sleeping* *(with her thumb in her mouth).*

**The Transitive Patterns**

5. **Subject** Transitive Verb **Direct Object**
   - *My roommate* baked *this apple pie.*

6. **Subject** Transitive Verb **Indirect Object**
   - *Marie* gave *Ramon* *a birthday gift.*

7. **Subject** Transitive Verb **Direct Object** **Objective Complement**
   - *The class* considered *the homework* *a real drag.*
   - *The teacher* called *the students* *brilliant!*

The teacher made the test hard.
The batter hit the ball hard.

My husband made me a chocolate cake.
My husband made me a happy man.

The singer appeared tired at the concert.
Black clouds appeared suddenly on the horizon.

Farmers in Illinois grow a lot of corn.
The corn grows fast in July.
We grew weary in the hot sun.
What do you do when students say, "Just check my grammar"?

1. Validate the students' desire for grammatical feedback ("Sure, we can take a look at the language stuff...").
2. Keep asking simple questions to elicit the full range of concerns (...What else would you like to talk about today? Are you still working on the content?").
3. Ask for an overview of the project. ("Before we get started, could you tell me about what you're working on and what you've included so far?").
4. When you find something confusing as you're reading the draft, start broadly ("Tell me more about this idea" or "I'm not sure what you mean here.").
5. Recast the students' explanations more grammatically or more clearly ("Let me see if I understand you correctly. You're saying that...").
6. Provide "linguistic input"—language that students read and hear, e.g., bits of English that are new to them (like a new word or idiomatic expression), or familiar bits of English being used in ways they've never heard before.
7. Provide the essential grammar and vocabulary, providing several options for students to choose from if possible.
8. Try to explain why we say it the way we do, but be comfortable with not knowing off the top of your head. Find resources to explore with the students to find the information you don't know.

What if students really mean, "Just check my grammar"?

Think of these strategies as being listed in the order they should be used in, but feel comfortable to experiment with the order, depending on the student, the writing project, and your own judgment. Play with them to see how each strategy helps enhance the students' learning experience.

1. Ask students to identify specific words, sentences, or types of grammatical structures they want feedback on ("What do you normally struggle with?" or "Show me a couple of things you're not sure about.").
2. Ask them to show you where they struggled to make language choices.
3. Read through and identify places you, as the reader, do not understand. Concentrate on thoughts that they are not communicating clearly before you move on to the passages that are incorrect but understandable.
4. Take one or two pages and underline every error you notice without correcting it, then ask the student to try making the corrections. Concentrate on what the students can't correct independently, then look for subsequent uses (correct and incorrect) of that structure to teach proofreading strategies and reinforce the language lesson.
5. Again, explain what you can, but enlist the students' help in using the reference books. If that fails, keep track of it to look it up later so you can learn how to explain it and/or find it again with another student.

See the fuller version of this handout on the UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center website: 
http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/esl/eslgrammarcheck.html
Recommended Readings


UNC Chapel Hill Writing Center “Just check my grammar” handout [http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/esl/eslgrammarcheck.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/esl/eslgrammarcheck.html)


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**Recommended Resources**

- Cambridge *Grammar of English*
- Learner’s dictionary, such as the Collins Cobuild *Advanced dictionary of American English*
- Thesaurus for English language learners, such as the Oxford *Learner’s thesaurus*