Vivian Zamel

Strangers in Academia: The Experiences of Faculty and ESL Students Across the Curriculum

When I go into a classroom these days, I look around and
feel like I'm in a different country.
—Professor of Management

A few weeks ago a professor came by the reading, writing
and study skills center where I tutor. He was with a young
Asian woman, obviously one of his students. He "deposited"
her in the center, claiming that she desperately needed help
with her English. The woman stared into the distance with
a frightened, nervous look on her face and tried to force a
smile. She handed me a paper she had written on the labor
union and asked if I could help her make corrections. After
a short introductory discussion, we looked at the paper that
we were about to revise—it was filled with red marks
indicating spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors; the
only written response was something along the lines of
"You need serious help with your English. Please see a
tutor."
—From a tutor's journal

Students in the lab speak to one another in their own
language so that they make sure they know what they are
doing. So they may look like they are not listening to the
lab teacher. He feels so isolated from them. He feels he has
no control, no power. So he may get angry.
—An ESL student

These comments show evidence of tensions
and conflicts that are becoming prevalent
in institutions of higher education as stu-
dent populations become more diverse. One clear indication that faculty
across the disciplines are concerned about the extent to which diverse
student populations, particularly students whose native language is not
English, constrain their work is the number of workshops and seminars

that have been organized, and at which I have participated, in order to address what these faculty view as the "ESL Problem."[1] In the course of preparing to work with faculty, and in order to get a sense of their issues and concerns, I surveyed instructors about their experiences working with non-native speakers of English. As Patricia Laurence has pointed out, though we acknowledge and discuss the diversity of students, "we neglect the 'polyphony' " that represents faculty voices (24). While I did not receive many responses to my request for feedback, those responses that were returned did indeed reflect this polyphony.

Some faculty saw this invitation to provide feedback as an opportunity to discuss the strengths and resources these students brought with them, indicated that ESL students, because of their experience and motivation, were a positive presence in their classes, and noted the contributions ESL students made in discussions that invited cross-cultural perspectives. One professor took issue with the very idea of making generalizations about ESL students. But this pattern of response did not represent the attitudes and perspectives revealed by other faculty responses. One professor, for example, referred to both silent students, on the one hand, and "vocal but incomprehensible students" on the other. But, by far, the greatest concern had to do with students' writing and language, which faculty saw as deficient and inadequate for undertaking the work in their courses. I got the clear sense from these responses that language use was confounded with intellectual ability—that, as Victor Villanueva, recounting his own schooling experiences, puts it, "bad language" and "insufficient cognitive development" were being conflated (11).

In order to demonstrate the range of faculty commentary, I've selected two faculty responses, not because they are necessarily representative, but because they reveal such divergent views on language, language development, and the role that faculty see themselves as playing in this development. I've also chosen these responses because they may serve as mirrors for our own perspectives and belief systems, and thus help us examine more critically what we ourselves think and do, both within our own classrooms and with respect to the larger institutional contexts in which we teach. In other words, although these responses came from two different disciplines, it is critical for each of us to examine the extent to which we catch glimpses of our own practices and assumptions in

Vivian Zamel is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts-Boston, where she directs the English as a Second Language Program and teaches composition courses for ESL students as well as graduate courses on ESL theory and pedagogy. She has written extensively on ESL writing and has co-authored, with Eleanor Kutz and Suzie Q. Groden, *The Discovery of Competence: Teaching and Learning with Diverse Student Writers* (Boynton/Cook, 1993).

these texts. The first response was written by an English Department instructor:

> One of my graduate school professors once told me that he knew within the first two weeks of the semester what his students' final grades would be. Recently I had a Burmese-born Chinese student who proved my professor wrong. After the first two essays, there was certainly no reason to be optimistic about this student's performance. The essays were very short, filled with second language errors, thesaurus words, and sweeping generalizations. In the first essay, it was obvious he had been taught to make outlines because that's all the paper was, really—a list. In the second essay, instead of dealing directly with the assigned text, the student directed most of his energy to form and structure. He had an introduction even though he had nothing to introduce. In his conclusion, he was making wild assertions (even though he had nothing to base them on) because he knew conclusions were supposed to make a point. By the fourth essay, he started to catch on to the fact that my comments were directed toward the content of his essays, not the form. Once he stopped worrying about thesis sentences, vocabulary, and the like, he became a different writer. His papers were long, thoughtful, and engaging. He was able to interpret and respond to texts and to make connections that I term "double face" as a way to comment on the ways in which different cultures define such terms as "respect." Instead of 1 1/4 pages, this essay was seven pages, and it made several references to the text while synthesizing it with his experience as someone who is a product of three cultures. This change not only affected the content of his writing, but also his mechanics. Though there were still errors, there were far fewer of them, and he was writing well enough where I felt it was safe to raise questions about structure and correctness.

This response begins with the recognition that we need to be wary of self-fulfilling prophecies about the potential of students, and indeed this instructor's narrative demonstrates compellingly the dangers of such prophecies. This instructor goes on to cite problems with the student's performance, but he speculates that these problems may have to do with previous instruction, thus reflecting a stance that counteracts the tendency to blame students. Despite the student's ongoing difficulties, the instructor does not despair over the presence of second language errors, over the short essays, the "sweeping generalizations," the empty introduction, the "wild assertions." Instead, this instructor seems to persist in his attempts to focus the student on content issues, to respond to the student seriously, to push him to consider the connections between what he was saying and the assigned reading, to take greater risks, which he succeeds in doing "by the fourth essay." In this, I believe, we see the instructor's understanding that

it takes multiple opportunities for students to trust that he is inviting them into serious engagement with the course material, that it takes time to acquire new approaches to written work. What seems to be revealed in this response is the instructor's belief in the student's potential, his appreciation for how language and learning are promoted, his refusal to draw conclusions about intellectual ability on the basis of surface features of language—all of which, in turn, helped the student become a "different writer," a change that affected the content of his writing, that had an impact on the very errors that filled his first papers, that even illuminated the instructor's reading of the assigned texts. This response suggests a rich and complicated notion of language, one that recognizes that language evolves in and responds to the context of saying something meaningful, that language and meaning are reciprocal and give rise to one another.

This response, especially the final section about surface level errors, foreshadows the other faculty response, which was written by an art history instructor and which reveals a very different set of assumptions and expectations:

> My experience with teaching ESL students is that they have often not received adequate English instruction to complete the required essay texts and papers in my classes. I have been particularly dismayed when I find that they have already completed 2 ESL courses and have no knowledge of the parts of speech or the terminology that is used in correcting English grammar on papers. I am certainly not in a position to teach English in my classes. (The problem has been particularly acute with Chinese/S. E. Asian students.) These students may have adequate intelligence to do well in the courses, but their language skills result in low grades. (I cannot give a good grade to a student who can only generate one or two broken sentences during a ten-minute slide comparison.)

The first assumption I see in this response is the belief that language and knowledge are separate entities, that language must be in place and fixed in order to do the work in the course. This static notion of language is further revealed by the instructor's assumption that language use is determined by a knowledge of parts of speech or grammatical terminology. Given this belief, it is understandable why she is dismayed by what she characterizes as students' lack of knowledge of grammar, a conclusion she has seemingly reached because her corrective feedback, presumably making use of grammatical terms, has not proven successful. This practice itself is not questioned, however; students or their inadequate English language instruction are held accountable instead. If students had been prepared appropriately, if the gatekeeping efforts had kept students out of her course until they were more like their native language counterparts, her com-

mentary suggests, students would be able to do the required work. There is little sense of how the unfamiliar terms, concepts, and ways of seeing that are particular to this course can be acquired. Nor is there an appreciation for how this very unfamiliarity with the course content may be constraining students' linguistic processes. She does not see, focusing as she does on difference, how she can contribute to students' language and written development, how she can build on what they know. Despite indicating that students may have "adequate intelligence to do well in the course," she doesn't seem to be able to get past their language problems when it comes to evaluating their work, thus missing the irony of grading on the basis of that which she acknowledges she is not "in a position to teach." The final parenthetical statement reveals further expectations about student work, raising questions about the extent to which her very expectations, rather than linguistic difficulties alone, contribute to the "broken sentences" to which she refers.

What we see at work here is in marked contrast to the model of possibility revealed in the first response. What seems to inform this second response is a deficit model of language and learning whereby students' deficiencies are foregrounded. This response is shaped by an essentialist view of language in which language is understood to be a decontextualized skill that can be taught in isolation from the production of meaning and that must be in place in order to undertake intellectual work. What we see here is an illustration of "the myth of transience," a belief that permeates institutions of higher education and perpetuates the notion that these students' problems are temporary and can be remediated—so long as some isolated set of courses or program of instruction, but not the real courses in the academy, takes on the responsibility of doing so (see Rose, "Language"). Such a belief supports the illusion that permanent solutions are possible, which releases faculty from the ongoing struggle and questioning that the teaching-learning process inevitably involves.

In these two faculty responses, we see the ways in which different sets of expectations and attitudes get played out. In the one classroom, we get some sense of what can happen when opportunities for learning are created, when students are invited into a thoughtful process of engaging texts, when students' writing is read and responded to in meaningful and supportive ways. In the other classroom, although we have little information about the conditions for learning, we are told that one way that learning is measured is by technically correct writing done during a 10-minute slide presentation, and this, I believe, is telling. For students who are not adequately prepared to do this work, there is little, the instructor tells us, she can do. Given this deterministic stance, students are closed off from participating in intellectual work.

At the same time that I was soliciting faculty responses to get a sense of their perceptions and assumptions, I began to survey ESL students about what they wanted faculty to know about their experiences and needs in classrooms across the curriculum. I wanted, in other words, to capture the polyphony of students' voices as well. I felt that the work I was engaging in with faculty could not take place without an exploration of students' views, especially since, although faculty have little reservation discussing what they want and expect from students, informing us about their frustrations and disappointments, the students' perspective is one that faculty often hear little about. And since I have become convinced that our role in our institutions ought not to be defined solely by the service we perform for other faculty (either by making our students' English native-like or keeping the gates closed until this is accomplished) but in helping faculty understand the role they need to begin to play in working with all students, the students' perspective was critical.

Within the last two years, I have collected more than 325 responses from first and second year ESL students enrolled in courses across a range of disciplines.[2] I discovered from looking at these responses a number of predominant and recurring themes. Students spoke of patience, tolerance, and encouragement as key factors that affected their learning:

> Teachers need to be more sensitive to ESL students needs of education. Since ESL students are face with the demands of culture ajustment, especially in the classroom, teaches must be patients and give flexible consideration. . . . For example—if a teacher get a paper that isn't clear or didn't follow the assignment correctly, teacher must talk and communicate with the students.

Students articulated the kinds of assistance they needed, pointing, for example, to clearer and more explicitly detailed assignments and more accessible classroom talk:

> In the classes, most teachers go over material without explaining any words that seems hard to understand for us. . . . I want college teachers should describe more clearly on questions in the exams, so we can understand clearly. Also, I think the teachers should write any important information or announcement on the board rather than just speaking in front of class, because sometimes we understand in different way when we hear it than when we read it.

Students spoke with pride about how much they knew and how much they had accomplished through working, they felt, harder than their native English-speaking counterparts did, and they wanted faculty to credit and acknowledge them for this.

> I would like them to know that we are very responsible and we know why
> we come to college: to learn. We are learning English as well as the major of
> our choice. It is very hard sometimes and we don't need professors who
> claimed that they don't understand us. The effort is double. We are very
> intelligent people. We deserve better consideration . . . ESL students are very
> competent and deserve to be in college. We made the step to college. Please
> make the other step to meet us.

At the same time, an overwhelming number of students wanted faculty to
know that they were well aware they were having language difficulties
and appreciated responses that would help them. But they also expressed
their wish that their work not be discounted and viewed as limited. They
seemed to have a very strong sense that because of difficulties that were
reflected in their attempts at classroom participation and in their written
work, their struggles with learning were misperceived and underesti-
mated:

> The academic skills of students who are not native speakers of English are not
> worse than academic skills of American students, in some areas it can be
> much better. Just because we have problems with language . . . that some
> professors hate because they don't want to spend a minute to listen a student,
> doesn't mean that we don't understand at all.

Students referred to professors who showed concern and seemed to appre-
ciate students' contributions. But the majority of students' responses de-
scribed classrooms that silenced them, that made them feel fearful and
inadequate, that limited possibilities for engagement, involvement, inclu-
sion.

While these students acknowledged that they continue to experience
difficulties, they also voiced their concern that these struggles not be
viewed as deficiencies, that their efforts be understood as serious attempts
to grapple with these difficulties. While faculty may feel overwhelmed by
and even resentful of working with such students, these students indicated
that they expect and need their instructors to assist them in this undertak-
ing, even making suggestions as to how this can be done. Indeed, the very
kind of clarity, accessible language, careful explanation, and effort that
faculty want students to demonstrate are the kinds of assistance students
were asking of faculty. Without dismissing the concerns of the art instruc-
tor, these students nevertheless believed, as does the English instructor,
that teaching ought to be responsive to their concerns.

Yet another source of information about students' classroom experi-
ences comes from my ongoing case-study of two students who attended a
composition course I taught two years ago and who have met with me
regularly since that time to discuss the work they are assigned, their

teachers' responses to and evaluation of their work, the classroom dynamics of their courses, the roles they and their teachers play, and the kinds of learning that are expected in their classes.

One of the students who has been participating in this longitudinal investigation is Motoko, a student from Japan who has taken a range of courses and is majoring in sociology. She described courses in which lively interaction was generated, in which students were expected to participate, to write frequent reaction papers and to undertake projects based on first-hand research, to challenge textbook material and to connect this material to their own lived experiences. But in most of her courses the picture was quite different. Lectures were pervasive, classes were so large that attendance wasn't even taken, and short answer tests were often the predominant means of evaluating student work. With respect to one class, for example, Motoko discussed the problematic nature of multiple-choice exams which, she believes, distort the information being tested and deliberately mislead students. In regard to another course, she described what she viewed as boring, even confusing lectures, but she persevered: "Because I don't like the professor, I work even harder. I don't want him to laugh at me. I don't want to be dehumanized. I came here to learn something, to gain something." In yet another course in which only the professor talked, she indicated that she was "drowning in his words." Even a class which assigned frequent written work, which Motoko completed successfully, disappointed her because she had such difficulty understanding the assignments and because her writing was not responded to in what she perceived as a thoughtful, respectful way. Motoko confided that despite her success in this course, she had lost interest in working on her papers.

The other student whose classroom experiences I've been following is Martha, a student from Colombia who, like Motoko, has taken a range of courses, and whose major is biology. Unlike Motoko, who had managed to negotiate "drowning words" and problematic assignments, Martha's sense of discouragement about the purposelessness of much of her work is far more pervasive. With respect to many of her courses, she complained about the absence of writing (which she views as essential for learning), the passive nature of class discussions, contrived assignments that "don't help her think about anything," and the lifeless comments she received. It was in her science courses, however, that she felt the greatest dissatisfaction and frustration. About one chemistry course, she spoke of "just trying to follow the lectures and get a grade in a huge class" that she characterized as a "disaster." She talked of the sense of superiority her professors project, of her inability to learn anything meaningful from assignments which require everyone "to come up with the same information." Her experiences have provoked her to write numerous pieces which reflect her

growing sense of despair and which provide a rich commentary on her perspective and experiences. In one of these pieces she has labeled the way professors behave as "academic harassment." In yet another, she questions the purpose of schooling, assignments, and written work: "Each teacher should ask her or himself the next question: Why do I assign a writing paper on this class? Do you want to see creativity and reflection of students or do or want a reproduction of the same book concept?" She is frustrated by the "lack of connections with the material we listen on lectures," the "monotony of the teaching method," the "limited style of questions," the "stressful process of learning." She concludes:

> I have no new words in my lexicon. And how do I know that? From my writing. No fluency. Why? I don't write. I was moving forward and now I'm stagnant. . . . Frustration and lack of interest are the present feelings with my classes because there is not any planned "agenda" to encourage the students to improve ourselves by writing. There is no rich opportunity to break barriers and answer questions to others and also to myself. There is no REACTION and INTERACTION . . . It does not really matter how many courses the students take in order to improve skills of writing because what it counts is the responsibility encouraged by the teacher's method! the kind of responsibility developed around us is first with *ourselves!* It is an incentive for us to be listened and respected by our writing work! You get into it. Reading provides you grammar. Reading and writing are not separate in the process. It is a combined one. Doble team. Reacting and interacting.

This account, like others Martha has written, reveals her commitment to learning, her insightful understanding of how learning is both promoted and undermined, how writing in particular plays an essential role in this learning, how critical it is for teachers to contribute to and encourage learning. She, like Motoko and the other students surveyed, has much to tell us about the barriers that prevent learning and how these barriers can be broken. And lest we conclude that what these students perceive about their experiences is specific to ESL learners, recent studies of teaching and learning in higher education indicate that this is not the case. For example, Chiseri-Strater's ethnography of university classrooms reveals the authoritarian and limited ways that subject matter is often approached, the ways in which students, even those who are successful, are left silent and empty by the contrived and inconsequential work of many classrooms.

This ongoing exploration of the expectations, perceptions and experiences of both faculty and students has clarified much for me about the academic life of ESL students and what we ought to be doing both within our classrooms and beyond. Given the hierarchical arrangement of course-work within post-secondary schools, given the primacy accorded to tradi-

tional discipline-specific courses, it is not surprising that ESL and other writing-based courses have a marginalized position, that these courses are thought to have no authentic content, that the work that goes on in these courses is not considered to be the "real" work of the academy.

This view typically gets played out through coursework that is determined by what students are assumed to need in courses across the curriculum, coursework whose function it is to "guard the tower," to use Shaughnessy's term, and keep the gates closed in the case of students who are not deemed ready to enter ("Diving"). This often implies instruction that focuses on grammar, decontextualized language skills, and surface features of language. And we know from what faculty continue to say about these issues that this is precisely what is expected of English and ESL instruction—and, unfortunately, many of us have been all too ready to comply. Mike Rose speaks to the profoundly exclusionary nature of such a pedagogy and argues that a focus on mechanical skills and grammatical features reduces the complexity of language to simple and discrete problems, keeps teachers from exploring students' knowledge and potential, and contributes to the "second-class intellectual status" to which the teaching of writing has been assigned ("Language" 348). Furthermore, the problematic assumption that writing or ESL programs are in place to serve the academy, that their function is to benefit other academic studies, prevents us from questioning our situation within the larger institution. "Service course ideology," Tom Fox points out, "often leaves the curricular decisions in the hands of those who are not especially knowledgeable about writing instruction," which ultimately means that "political questions—in fact, *any* questions that challenge existing definitions of basic writing—become irrelevant to the bureaucratic task of reproducing the program" ("Basic" 67).

While skills-based and deficit models of instruction bring these kinds of pressures to bear on our work with students, our teaching has further been constrained by composition specialists who make claims about the need for students to adopt the language and discourse conventions of the academy if they are to succeed. David Bartholomae's article, "Inventing the University," is often cited and called upon to argue that students need to approximate and adopt the "specialized discourse of the university" (17). In the ESL literature, a reductive version of this position has been embraced by professionals who maintain that the role that ESL coursework ought to play is one of preparing students for the expectations and demands of discipline-specific communities across the curriculum. Such an approach, however, misrepresents and oversimplifies academic discourse and reduces it to some stable and autonomous phenomenon that does not reflect reality. Such instruction, like coursework shaped by limited conceptualiza-

tions of language, undermines *our* expertise and position. And because such instruction privileges and perpetuates the status quo, because it exaggerates the "distinctiveness of academic discourse [and] its separation from student literacy" (Fox, "Basic" 70), such a pedagogy has been characterized in terms of assimilation, colonization, domination, and deracination (Clark; Fox; Gay; Horner; Trimbur).

While there is growing debate about this instructional approach in the field of composition, there have been fewer attempts to problematize this model of teaching in ESL composition, where the norms and conventions of the English language and its discourses have particularly powerful political implications.[3] Hence the need to raise questions about such an instructional focus when it is applied to our work with non-native speakers of English. As I have argued elsewhere, we need to critique approaches that are reductive and formulaic, examine the notion that the language of the academy is a monolithic discourse that can be packaged and transmitted to students, and argue that this attempt to serve the institution in these ways contributes to our marginal status and that of our students.

Those of us who have tried to accommodate institutional demands have, no doubt, found this to be a troubling and tension-filled undertaking, since even when we focus on standards of language use or conventions of academic discourse, students, especially those who are still acquiring English, are not necessarily more successful in meeting the expectations of other faculty. There seems to be little carry-over from such instructional efforts to subsequent work since it is the very nature of such narrowly conceptualized instruction that undercuts genuine learning. As Fox argues, writing teachers who uphold a mythical and fixed set of institutional standards and skills are enacting a pedagogy that, however well-intentioned, is an "unqualifiable failure" ("Standards" 42). Those of us who have resisted and questioned such a pedagogy, embracing a richer and more complicated understanding of how language, discourse, and context are intertwined, may be able to trace the strides students make and to appreciate the intelligence their language and writing reveal, and yet find that this is not extended by other faculty who cannot imagine taking on this kind of responsibility.

We need to recognize that in the same way that faculty establish what Martha calls "barriers" between themselves and students, in the same way that faculty "exoticize" ESL students, we too, especially if our primary work is with ESL students, are perceived as "outsiders."[4] And as long as these boundaries continue to delineate and separate what we and other faculty do, as long as we are expected to "fix" students' problems, then misunderstandings, unfulfilled expectations, frustration, and even resentment will continue to mark our experiences. But this need not be the case. We are beginning to see changes in institutions in response to the growing

recognition that faculty across the disciplines must take responsibility for working with all students. Studies, such as the ethnography undertaken by Walvoord and McCarthy, have documented the transformation of faculty from a range of disciplines who became more responsive to the needs of their students as they undertook their own classroom research and examined their own assumptions and expectations.

In my own work with faculty at a number of different institutions, including my own, what first begins as a concern about "underprepared" or "deficient" ESL students often leads to a consideration of the same kinds of pedagogical issues that are at the heart of writing across the curriculum initiatives. But these issues are reconsidered with specific reference to working with ESL students. Together, we have explored our instructional goals, the purposes for assigned work, the means for reading and evaluating this work, the roles that engagement, context, and classroom dynamics play in promoting learning. Through this collaboration faculty have begun to understand that it is unrealistic and ultimately counterproductive to expect writing and ESL programs to be responsible for providing students with the language, discourse, and multiple ways of seeing required across courses. They are recognizing that the process of acquisition is slow-paced and continues to evolve with exposure, immersion, and involvement, that learning is responsive to situations in which students are invited to participate in the construction of meaning and knowledge. They have come to realize that every discipline, indeed every classroom, may represent a distinct culture and thus needs to make it possible for those new to the context to practice and approximate its "ways with words." Along with acknowledging the implications of an essentialist view of language and of the myth of transience, we have considered the myth of coverage, the belief that covering course content necessarily means that it has been learned. Hull and Rose, in their study of the logic underlying a student's unconventional reading of a text, critique "the desire of efficiency and coverage" for the ways it "limit[s] rather than enhance[s] [students'] participation in intellectual work" (296), for the ways it undermines students' entry into the academy. With this in mind, we have raised questions about what we do in order to cover material, why we do what we do, what we expect from students, and how coverage is evaluated. And if the "cover-the-material" model doesn't seem to be working in the ways we expected, we ask, what alternatives are there?

We have also examined the ways in which deficit thinking, a focus on difference, blinds us to the logic, intelligence and richness of students' processes and knowledge. In *Lives on the Boundary,* Mike Rose cites numerous cases of learners (including himself) whose success was undercut because of the tendency to emphasize difference. Studies undertaken by

Glynda Hull and her colleagues further attest to how such belief systems about students can lead to inaccurate judgments about learners' abilities, and how practices based on such beliefs perpetuate and "virtually assure failure" (325). The excerpt from the tutor's journal quoted at the beginning of this article, along with many of the faculty and student responses that I have elicited, are yet other indications of what happens when our reading of student work is derailed by a focus on what is presumed to be students' deficiencies. Thus we try to read students' texts to see what is there rather than what isn't, resisting generalizations about literacy and intelligence that are made on the basis of judgments about standards of correctness and form, and suspending our judgments about the alternative rhetorical approaches our students adopt.

In addition to working with faculty to shape the curriculum so that it is responsive to students' needs and to generate instructional approaches that build on students' competence, we address other institutional practices that affect our students. At the University of Massachusetts, for example, the Writing Proficiency Exam, which all students must pass by the time they are juniors, continues to evolve as faculty across the curriculum work together, implementing and modifying it over time. While the exam is impressive, immersing students in rich, thematically-integrated material to read, think about, and respond to, it nevertheless continues to be reconsidered and questioned as we study the ways in which the exam impinges on students' academic lives. And so, for instance, in order to address the finding that ESL students were failing the exam at higher rates than native speakers of English—a situation that is occurring at other institutions as well (see Ray)—we have tried to ensure that faculty understand how to look below the surface of student texts for evidence of proficiency, promoting a kind of reading that benefits not just ESL students but all students. The portfolio option, which requires students to submit papers written in courses as well as to write an essay in response to a set of readings, has proven a better alternative for ESL students to demonstrate writing proficiency. This is not surprising, given that the portfolio allows students to demonstrate what they are capable of when writing is imbedded within and an outgrowth of their courses.

Throughout this work, one of the most critical notions that I try to bring home is the idea that what faculty ought to be doing to enhance the learning of ESL students is *not* a concession, a capitulation, a giving up of standards—since the unrevised approaches that some faculty want to retain may never have been beneficial for *any* students. As John Mayher has pointed out, teaching and learning across college courses are by and large dysfunctional for all students, even those that succeed. What ESL students need—multiple opportunities to use language and write-to-learn, course work which draws on and values what students already know,

classroom exchanges and assignments that promote the acquisition of unfamiliar language, concepts, and approaches to inquiry, evaluation that allows students to demonstrate genuine understanding—is good pedagogy for everyone. Learning how to better address the needs of ESL students, because it involves becoming more reflective about teaching, because it involves carefully thinking through the expectations, values, and assumptions underlying the work we assign, helps faculty teach everyone better. In other words, rather than seeing the implications of inclusion and diversity in opposition to excellence and academic standards (as they often are at meetings convened to discuss these issues), learning to teach ESL students, because this challenges us to reconceptualize teaching, contributes to and enhances learning, and for all students. As Gerald Graff has argued in response to those who voice their concerns about the presence of new student populations in their institutions and the negative consequences that this change brings,

> Conservatives who accuse affirmative action programs of lowering academic standards never mention the notorious standard for ignorance that was set by white male college students before women and minorities were permitted in large numbers on campus. It has been the steady pressure for reform from below that has raised academic standards. (88)

Needless to say, given the complexity of this enterprise, these efforts have not transformed classrooms on an institution-wide basis. As is obvious from the surveys and case studies I have undertaken, change is slow, much like the process of learning itself. Shaughnessy referred to the students who entered the CUNY system through open admissions as "strangers in academia" to give us a sense of the cultural and linguistic alienation they were experiencing (*Errors*). In listening to the comments of faculty (note, for example, the comment of the professor of management), it occurs to me that they too are feeling like strangers in academia, that they no longer understand the world in which they work. Janice Neulieb similarly points out that although it is common to view students as "other," as alienated from the academic community, our differing cultural perspectives result in our own confusion and alienation as well.

As we grapple with the kinds of issues and concerns raised by the clash of cultures in academia, we continue to make adjustments which, in turn, generate new questions about our practices. This ongoing dialogue is both necessary and beneficial. Like other prominent debates in higher education on reforming the canon and the implications of diversity, this attempt to explore and interrogate what we do is slowly reconfiguring the landscape and blurring the borders within what was once a fairly well-defined and stable academic community. According to Graff, this is all to the good because this kind of transformation can revitalize higher education and its

isolated departments and fragmentary curricula. Within composition, the conflicts and struggles that inevitably mark the teaching of writing are viewed as instructive because they allow students and teachers to "reposition" themselves, raising questions about conventional thinking about instruction and challenging us to imagine alternative pedagogies (Lu; Horner). What Pratt calls the "contact zone," because it represents a site of contestation, is embraced because it enables us to redraw disciplinary boundaries, to reexamine composition instruction, and to revise our assumptions about language and difference.

When faculty see this kind of redefinition as a crisis, I invite them to reconsider their work in light of the way the word "crisis" is translated into Chinese. In Chinese, the word is symbolized by two ideographs—one meaning danger, the other meaning opportunity. Because the challenges that students bring with them may make us feel confused, uncertain, like strangers in our own community, there will be dissonance, jarring questions, ongoing dilemmas, unfulfilled expectations. We can see this reflected in the second faculty response, a response which insists that there are students who don't belong in the academy, that its doors be kept closed. But, as we saw in the first response, perplexities and tensions can also be generative, creating possibilities for new insights, alternative interpretations, and an appreciation for the ways in which these enrich our understanding. Seen from the fresh perspective that another language can provide, the Chinese translation of crisis captures the very nature of learning, a process involving both risk and opportunity, the very process that ideally students ought to engage in, but which we ourselves may resist when it comes to looking at our own practices. But as Giroux urges, teachers must "cross over borders that are culturally strange and alien to them" so that they can "analyze their own values and voices as viewed from different ideological and cultural spaces" (254–55). It is when we take risks of this sort, when we take this step into the unknown, by looking for evidence of students' intelligence, by rereading their attempts as coherent efforts, by valuing, not just evaluating, their work, and by reflecting on the critical relationship between our work and theirs, that opportunities are created not only for students but for teachers to learn in new ways.

Notes

1. The acronym ESL (English as a Second Language) is used here because it is the commonly used term to refer to students whose native language is not English. Given the inherently political nature of working with ESL learners, it is important to note that at urban institutions, such as the University of Massachusetts at Boston, most of these students are residents of the United States. Furthermore, in the case of a number of these students, English may be a third or fourth language.

2. This investigation of student responses was first initiated by Spack, whose findings

were published in *Blair Resources for Teaching Writing: English as a Second Language.* My ongoing survey builds on her work.

3. See, however, the work of Benesch, McKay, Raimes, and Zamel—all of whom have raised questions about the ideological

assumptions underlying much ESL writing instruction.

4. I am indebted here to Patricia Bizzell, whom I first heard use the term *exoticize* to characterize how faculty often react towards ESL students.

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