Introduction: Issues and Perspectives in Second Language Writing Teacher Education in Non-English Dominant Contexts

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This book explores the intersection of teacher education and the ecology of second language (L2) writing by expanding the scope of the field to include under-represented countries and regions across the globe and to provide a systematic discussion of L2 writing teacher education in non-English dominant contexts. We are particularly interested in expanding the current, but limited, dialogue on what it means to teach L2 writing in contexts where teaching writing mainly provides students with opportunities to practice newly learned vocabulary and grammatical structure and is often perceived as enhancing language proficiency. By spotlighting teacher literacy in L2 writing across 12 countries, we hope not only to move beyond the monopoly of related research conducted within the realm of English-dominant contexts (specifically in North America), but also to make the challenges and triumphs experienced around English as a foreign language (EFL) writing teacher preparation and development more visible in under-represented language teaching communities.

The overreliance on English-dominant contexts in L2 writing scholarship has been identified in the field for more than a decade now (e.g. Manchón, 2009; Manchón & de Haan, 2008; Ortega, 2004). Since Ortega’s (2004: 3) declaration that ‘L2 writing as a field is heavily ESL-oriented,’ empirical research in EFL writing has grown in both publications and academic conferences and has addressed a wide range of theoretical and pedagogical issues prevalent across diverse teaching settings. Linking such growth to the strength and vitality of foreign language writing research, Manchón and de Haan’s (2008) special issue of the Journal of Second Language Writing (JSLW), showcases articles on cognition and foreign
language writing in three different contexts in an attempt to continue rectifying the ‘traditional’ and ‘unproductive’ L2 bias of the field. Similarly, both Manchón (2009) and Cimasko and Reichelt’s (2011) edited collections feature chapters that reflect critically on foreign language writing theory, research and pedagogy, and position foreign language writing more centrally in mainstream L2 writing theoretical and pedagogical discussions. Regarding the role of teachers in L2 writing instruction, Hirvela and Belcher (2007) note that significantly more research has been devoted to understanding the needs and experiences of L2 writers than L2 writing teachers. In their special issue of JSLW, they ‘initiate a process of drawing attention to the teacher education realm of the L2 writing field’ (Hirvela & Belcher, 2007: 126) by highlighting the intersections of teacher education and the writing instruction areas of language, genre, response and assessment. While there is no question that the increase in L2 writing teacher education and foreign language writing scholarship in the last decade has advanced the field, research on the intersection of the two areas (i.e. L2 writing teacher education in foreign language contexts) is still minimal and predominantly limited to English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

By exploring the complex layers of L2 writing teacher education in non-English dominant contexts, this collection attempts to fill this gap. Such an agenda required us to push the boundaries of teacher education by specifically examining the development of teacher literacy in under-researched L2 writing contexts where L2 writing instruction is mainly perceived, by both the students and teachers, as a means to develop language proficiency, and where first language (L1) and L2 writing instruction may not even exist. Here, we re-envision a broader understanding of L2 writing teacher education as contextually and culturally appropriate, moving away from the uncritical embrace of Western-based L1 or L2 writing pedagogies. Because the training of L2 writing instruction in teacher education programs is not the norm in many non-English dominant contexts (Casanave, 2009; Leki, 2001; Manchón, 2009), language teachers in these contexts tend to provide literacy instruction based on their personal experiences with L2 writing. With this in mind, this book includes voices from contexts where the teaching of writing is not always prioritized and where language teachers often struggle with such local realities as varied language proficiency, instituted curricular requirements, limited materials and resources, and large class sizes. It is our hope that readers will journey through the complete collection and discover the subtle aspects, social experiences and local contingencies that drive English language teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and practices related to L2 writing instruction in non-English dominant contexts.

An Overview of the Book

This volume presents chapters by L2 writing specialists who have worked in various regions where English is widely studied as a foreign
language, including East Asia (Hong Kong, China, Japan), Southeast Asia (Singapore, Thailand), South Asia (Nepal), the Middle East (Qatar, Turkey, Northern Cyprus), Europe (Spain) and South America (Argentina, Brazil). Reporting on cases in 12 different countries, the contributors turn our attention to various theoretical and pedagogical issues related to the everyday challenges teachers face teaching writing in exam-burdened environments. While the chapters present shared issues and concerns in the ways in which teachers in these contexts learn to write and develop expertise in teaching writing, the readers will also see differences in the way resources are distributed, pedagogies are shared, courses are designed and training programs are shaped across different teaching contexts. The understanding of local variations and contingencies in relation to how L2 writing instruction works is at the heart of this volume. To better understand the characteristics of teacher expertise and to investigate how teachers transition from routine to adaptive expertise (Hirvela, Chapter 1), we take a closer look at the ecological factors that impact writing instruction and teacher education in contexts where both students and teachers may have limited opportunities to write-to-learn both in their mother tongue and in their additional language. With this in mind, the chapters in this collection carry on the work initiated by Manchón and de Haan (2008), Manchón (2009) and Cimasko and Reichelt (2011), who attest that teaching L2 writing in non-English dominant contexts carries sharp contrasts in the methods and materials used, as well as with the ideological and ethical dilemmas experienced by teachers.

Referring to L2 writing teacher education as an ‘unstudied problem’ (Freeman, 1996), Alan Hirvela in Chapter 1 discusses the expertise gap in L2 writing teacher education by drawing on the notion of ‘adaptive expertise,’ which is the understanding that teachers reflectively adopt their instructional knowledge as they work with students and constantly rely on their prior knowledge about the context. Hirvela eloquently argues for the importance of examining teachers’ writing instruction and raising their awareness of the routine–adaptive expertise distinction. This chapter reminds readers that accounting for writing teacher expertise is a complex issue that requires the adoption of an analytical lens on writing instruction. Hirvela emphasizes, ‘what matters most is that we take a step forward in L2 writing research by placing greater emphasis on studying writing teachers and, while doing so, exploring their writing instruction within the guiding framework of L2 writing teacher expertise instead of assuming that expertise is already a well-understood construct’ (p. 27).

Another area addressed in the book is the lack of focus in the area of L2 writing feedback in EFL classrooms. Using data from two English teachers’ written reflections on readings in an L2 writing course, Icy Lee, in Chapter 2, explores the feedback literacy development of English teachers in Hong Kong who challenged their earlier assumptions about conventional feedback practices after enrolling in a writing teacher education
course. The chapter discusses the importance of EFL writing teachers’ active role during the feedback process. According to Lee, EFL teachers’ feedback literacy development can be facilitated through ‘engaging teachers with relevant research literature,’ ‘stimulating classroom discussions’ like the mini-debate described in the chapter, and ‘providing opportunities for critical reflection through small-scale classroom inquiry’ (p. 48). Lee reminds readers that writing teacher education on the topic of feedback should not be limited to university spaces, encouraging educators to support frontline teachers in their ongoing feedback literacy development and critical reflection on how they provide feedback to students.

In Chapter 3, Zhiwei Wu and Xiaoye You offer a powerful overview on how English writing pedagogies have been constructed and disseminated in China and present a case study of a group of teachers who negotiate in institutional and classroom contexts to develop locally appropriate writing pedagogies. Sharing the voices of seven in-service English writing teachers from three regions in China, this chapter illustrates how the norms of English writing pedagogies are established and negotiated in China and how English writing teachers shape and are shaped by academic discourse, institutional policies and classroom dynamics, thereby addressing the tensions between academic theories and professed practices, between school regulations and individual creativities, and between teachers’ beliefs and students’ realities.

Shedding light on another East Asian context in Chapter 4, Keiko Hirose and Chris Harwood highlight several challenges faced in L2 writing teacher education in Japan, where teachers of English generally have little training in English writing instruction. More specifically, the authors discuss how Japanese teachers’ secondary and tertiary education experiences shape their perceptions and future English writing pedagogy and assess the impact of the national English education guidelines and university entrance examinations on their instructional practices. Regarding L2 writing teachers’ beliefs and practices, their findings reveal that teachers in Japan see a large gap between their teaching realities and ideals of teaching. They argue that there is a need to foster more autonomous L2 writers in Japan through the adoption of new writing practices, which require a pedagogical shift from teacher-fronted grammar-translation to student-centered active learning, as well as a need to implement changes to L2 writing teacher education.

Sarah J. McCarthey, in Chapter 5, discusses the major differences that exist among teacher education programs across global contexts due to ‘cultural and historical trajectories and economic global positioning’ (p. 91) and stresses the need to document the impact of these trends on teacher education, something this collection aims to do. Focusing on the Southeast Asian context of Singapore, a small city state with a multi-ethnic population, McCarthey presents a qualitative study focused on understanding how English teachers are prepared to teach writing to
students in primary and secondary schools. Her findings highlight the main factors influencing teacher preparation in this context, including: (1) limited English use in schools; (2) centrally controlled syllabi; (3) classroom practices that discourage learner mistakes; and (4) exam-oriented environments. In spite of the challenges these contextual factors present, pre-service teachers in this context demonstrated increased understanding of textual features and acceptance of innovative writing pedagogies through teacher educators’ genre-focused lessons paired with discussions of process. Additionally, pre-service teachers were presented with several professional development opportunities to support their writing instruction thanks to a collaborative partnership between the government, teacher education programs and local schools. Such collaboration, as McCarthey notes, is ‘particularly important for increasing teachers’ competence and confidence in teaching writing’ (p. 109).

To generate an understanding of how L2 writing pedagogy is approached in Thailand and to highlight how English teachers in this context are (not) prepared to teach writing, Tanita Saenkhum details a qualitative study of primary and secondary teachers in Chapter 6. Here, she situates English writing instruction and related teacher training within national language teaching policies before presenting her findings, which include the pedagogical prioritization of speaking, the association of grammar and vocabulary with writing, and the lack of L2 writing specific training in teacher education and professional development programs. Saenkhum concludes by posing three questions: (1) Should an L2 writing practicum be required for pre-service teachers? (2) Should L2 writing be taught as an independent class in primary and secondary contexts? and (3) Should collaboration between universities and schools be developed? While her findings support answering each question positively, Saenkhum acknowledges the context-specific factors that complicate the logistics of doing so in EFL contexts like Thailand and challenges teacher educators to move related conversations forward collaboratively.

Moving to the South Asian context in Chapter 7, Sarah Henderson Lee and Shyam B. Pandey detail a qualitative study of primary, secondary and post-secondary English teachers and teacher trainers’ experiences with L2 writing instruction in the culturally and linguistically diverse context of Nepal. After discussing the country’s current state of English language teaching, including teacher education specific to the teaching of writing, the authors report their findings in the areas of teacher preparation and continued development, classroom successes and challenges, and resources and support systems. They argue that the disconnect between pre-service training and in-service practice, the top-down approach to professional development, and other logistical constraints such as classroom space and students’ varied linguistics abilities hamper motivated teachers’ professional development in L2 writing and call for more local collaboration between teachers and trainers.
In Chapter 8, Thomas D. Mitchell and Silvia Pessoa showcase a model of collaboration between language specialists and disciplinary faculty to improve university-level students’ L2 writing across disciplines in Qatar. In the EFL context of English-medium universities, increasing numbers of multilingual students are required to meet the writing expectations of disciplinary faculty who may not have any pedagogical training, especially training specific to the teaching of L2 writing. Through text analysis, think-aloud protocols, interviews, collaborative (re)development of materials and co-teaching, Mitchell and Pessoa’s case study of Robert, a design professor, emphasizes the need for such collaboration in preparing disciplinary faculty to effectively scaffold L2 writing development in their teaching contexts. Additionally, their findings contribute to advancing L2 writing specialists’ understanding of the writing demands multilingual students face outside of first year writing classes, as well as the language resources they need to meet discipline-specific writing expectations.

Reflecting on recent English language policy and planning changes, teacher education programs in Turkey, like many other EFL contexts, largely prioritize communicative language teaching and the development of spoken language proficiency. Aylin Ünalı, Lisya Seloni, Şebnem Yalçın and Nur Yiğitoğlu Aptoula call attention to the importance of written communication skills for teacher candidates in EFL teacher training programs in Chapter 9, where they share a collaborative examination and revisioning of one foreign language teacher education program’s first year writing sequence. The authors argue that such a critical analysis of teacher training programs is necessary to better understand the tensions surrounding L2 writing instruction in EFL contexts and the writing needs and experiences of future language teachers, who often do not see themselves as strong writers in English. To better reflect 21st century writing practices and the lives of the teacher candidates outside of school, Ünalı et al. suggest broadening the scope of the first year writing sequence to include both academic and non-academic genres. Additionally, they propose a required course on writing pedagogy, where teacher candidates can ‘reflexively think about various L2 writing issues as they apply to their own local contexts rather than focusing on the wholesale application of writing pedagogies imported from the Western world’ (p. 192).

Alev Özbilgin-Gezgin and Betil Eröz, in Chapter 10, detail a case study of the L2 writing and writing pedagogy experiences of both teacher candidates and faculty in an English teacher education program in Northern Cyprus, a context with strong ties to Turkey. Data sources, including written artifacts and interviews, reveal an emphasis on academic writing basics such as organization and mechanics during teacher candidates’ first year. This focus, according to the authors’ findings, was appreciated by teacher candidate participants, who often had limited opportunities to develop such skills during their primary and secondary
education, and by faculty participants, who noted the low language proficiency of incoming students. While challenging, Özbilgin-Gezgin and Eröz highlight the importance of simultaneously developing teacher candidates as L2 writers and future teachers of L2 writing in EFL teacher education contexts.

Shifting the contextual focus to Europe, Lourdes Cerezo, Belén González-Cruz and José Ángel Mercader remind readers in Chapter 11 of the distinction between learning to write and writing to learn an additional language, noting that learners in EFL contexts, unlike ESL contexts, most often engage in L2 writing for the purpose of developing their overall L2 competences. Focusing on the primary and secondary educational contexts in Spain, the authors argue that teachers who are educated and trained in the language learning potential of L2 writing are at an advantage. Moreover, they suggest that universities and teacher resource centers responsible for the preparation and continued development of teachers include opportunities for pre- and in-service teachers to develop their own language skills through writing, as well as explicit instruction in the theoretical underpinnings of writing to learn and the practical applications to primary and secondary EFL classrooms.

To better understand issues of motivation and identity in language teacher education programs in Argentina, Darío Luis Banegas, Cristina Nieva, Marianela Herrera, Luísa Doroñuk and Yanina Salgueiro, in Chapter 12, share findings from a study focused on their own L2 writing experiences as teacher educator and student-teachers in an online teacher education program. Analysis of student-teachers’ genre-specific texts, written reflections and a post-course interview highlight the relationship between language proficiency development through academic writing and professional identity construction. The student-teachers’ prioritization of language proficiency in their professional development and identity construction, as well as their increased motivation to meet the challenges of genre-specific writing with the support of teacher feedback, emphasize the need for language teacher education programs in Argentina and elsewhere to consider notions of teacher identity and motivation in curricular decisions, materials development and instructional practices. By doing so, the authors note, student-teachers will be able to ‘strengthen and (re)configure their present identity as student-teachers and language learners in relation to their imagined future identity as EFL teachers’ (p. 268).

In Chapter 13, Solange Aranha and Luciana C. de Oliveira explore the political, social and cultural factors impacting local teacher education programs that focus on the teaching and learning of foreign languages in Brazil. Their analysis of teacher education program sequences at five public universities in different regions of the country shows little to no focus on writing pedagogy, even in the few contexts where writing was taught as a productive skill. To address this gap, the authors propose four specific areas of writing teacher education for university programs to
consider embedding in their current curricula: (1) a genre-based approach to writing instruction; (2) designing, learning and practicing teaching writing; (3) participation in the institutional program of grants for initiation into teaching; and (4) foreign language writing assessment. Noting that such a proposal is dependent on a national effort to revise curricula across the country, Aranha and de Oliveira’s work aims to foster more conversations around the theme of L2 writing teacher education in Brazil.

One of the overlapping themes across chapters in this collection is how L2 writing teacher education is dependent on various contextual factors and social experiences that impact both writing instruction and teacher preparation. Melinda Reichelt, in Chapter 14, articulately discusses how local and institutional factors as well as the sociolinguistic status of English shape L2 writing teacher education in non-English dominant contexts. According to Reichelt, in order to avoid the application of inappropriate writing pedagogies, especially for teachers who attend graduate programs in Inner Circle countries and then teach EFL writing, practicing teachers need to be aware of how the sociolinguistic status of the target language in a given context affects learners’ perceptions of the language and, in turn, the importance (or lack thereof) of learning to write. For example, when the target language and the students’ native language(s) employ different writing systems, much attention must be paid to the beginning stages of instruction and to the writing system itself. Thus, the linguistic distance between students and teachers’ L1 and the target language is seen as another shaping factor.

Moving Forward: Reflexive and Ecologically Responsible L2 Writing Teacher Education

One value of editing a collection on L2 writing and teacher education in non-English dominant instructional settings is drawing the field’s attention to the wide range of contextual variations we see regarding the stages teachers move through in their professional careers, especially in terms of teaching writing to student populations with varied language proficiencies, language attitudes and literacy backgrounds in both their L1s and L2s. This collection brought together empirical research that investigates the teacher education dimension of teaching L2 writing, primarily focusing on how teachers understand and interpret their local realities around English use and the teaching of L2 writing. As many of the contributors in this collection suggest, teacher training in non-English dominant contexts suffers from three primary disconnections: (1) a disconnect between the realities of local teachers and Western pedagogies (specifically, writing scholarship emerging from the North American context); (2) a disconnect between available resources and professed practices; and (3) a disconnect between teacher training and students’ language needs. Since many teacher education programs do not have courses devoted to preparing
students to teach L2 writing, Reichelt (Chapter 14) encourages pre- and in-service teachers to address such disconnections by reflecting on their local teaching contexts and practices. Among the useful activities that can prepare local teachers for L2 writing instruction are engaging English teachers in English language writing in different genres, discussing case study scenarios related to teaching writing, investigating the sociolinguistic status of English in particular communities and exploring local beliefs and circumstances regarding writing instruction. We think that these practical suggestions are also useful for the preparation of Anglo teachers who plan to teach L2 writing in countries where they have little knowledge about the educational and linguistic practices of the local context.

To own one’s professional identity as a language teacher requires the hard work of reflecting on teacher beliefs and reasoning, which shape the ways classroom events are acted on and interpreted (Johnson & Ma, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). While reflecting on what it means to be a language teacher – and more specifically a writing teacher – in our individual contexts and making sense of our classrooms based on the locally produced peculiarities, opportunities and constraints is an inextricably complex task, more empirical and pedagogical work theorizing teachers’ classroom practices would shed light on and create space for a better understanding of teacher expertise and practice in under-represented communities.

To produce robust and inclusive knowledge in the field of L2 writing, we need to move beyond perceiving L2 writing scholarship as if it only takes place in English-dominant contexts with writers who use English on a daily basis or with teachers who are trained exclusively in North American pedagogies. With this in mind, the chapters in this collection discuss how the epistemologies that guide teachers’ instructional practices are highly shaped by and also shape local dynamics that play a crucial role in teaching writing in non-English dominant contexts. The ESL-bias of writing scholarship pointed out by Ortega (2004) not only limits the manner in which L2 writing is taught in global contexts, but also puts undue pressure on teachers, students, parents and institutions. As the chapters in this book illustrate, L2 writing scholarship should also include the people, contexts, pedagogies, epistemologies, institutional limitations and sociolinguistic realities of teachers who operate from a reality different from those in English-dominant contexts. To expand our understanding of local teaching practices and teacher literacy in L2 writing, we need also to be engaged in the ‘dual exploration of the learning-to-write and writing-to-learn dimensions of writing in an additional language’ (Manchón, 2011: 4) outside the context of North America and pay attention to how local teachers translate L2 writing scholarship in a way that makes sense for their own particular contexts. Emphasizing the crucial role teacher agency plays in advancing language learners’ L2 knowledge and knowledge of writing in diverse genres, the work presented in this
book showcases locally developed L2 writing pedagogies, instructional frameworks and teacher preparation models, attempting to bring a fuller understanding of the language learning function of L2 writing, as well as teachers’ own practices around learning to write in their additional language. The presence of voices from non-English dominant teaching and learning contexts is an important step in creating a more inclusive body of knowledge in L2 writing teacher education scholarship.

As Henderson Lee and Pandey put it in Chapter 7, ‘reflective teachers become local agents of change by critically reflecting on data from their own writing instruction’ (p. 146). Reflexivity, therefore, is one of the main research agendas that we hope to promote with this book. As reflected by the empirical work presented in this collection, language teachers, especially those who are not trained to be writing teachers per se but who are expected to teach writing, should integrate reflexivity in their everyday practice in order to make sense of locally relevant pedagogies, set a realistic agenda for providing feedback (or utilizing classroom practices such as peer feedback), and identify appropriate strategies for navigating through their learning and teaching contexts. Finally, this book attempts to bring our attention to an ecological framework of teacher education (Casanave, 2009) where we acknowledge the complex, messy, interrelated and contextual nature of teaching and learning and reject the wholesale application of pedagogies in language teacher education programs and acknowledge individual expectations, needs, social experience, resources and constraints within local schooling contexts. As Casanave (2009: 257) notes, ‘the main issues that writing teachers and educators of future teachers of writing face concern our need to understand, be sensitive to, and adapt to local conditions of learning and teaching.’ In this vein, we need to be prepared to listen to teachers’ stories and understand the complex dynamics of teaching and learning situations, as well as to critically reflect on the sustainability and appropriateness of writing instructional pedagogies, materials used and resources available for particular contexts. Keeping these ecological realities of teaching writing in mind, we want to leave readers with the following questions to consider for their unique teaching contexts and encourage them to think about research agendas that could promote reflexive and ecological L2 writing teacher education in their own particular teaching and learning situations:

- What professional identities and standards do language teachers in my context share when it comes to teaching L2 writing?
- What coursework or professional development exists or is needed for pre- and in-service teachers who want to advance their professionalization in L2 writing?
- How are pre- and in-service teachers’ L2 writing knowledge base and practice assessed in my context?
• What theoretical frameworks and methodologies are prioritized in terms of L2 writing teacher education in my context?
• How do L2 writing teachers and scholars in my context theorize from localized practices?
• How do national education and local language policies impact L2 writing teacher education in my context?
• What collaborations exist or are needed for teacher educators and/or teachers of L2 writing in my context?
• What are the sociolinguistic realities of the English language and the urgency of L2 writing for students in my context?

Notes
(1) We acknowledge that the term second language writing is often used to refer to situations where writers compose texts in a language which is not their native language, but which is the dominant language of the context in which they live (e.g. non-native English speakers in the United States). The concept of foreign language writing, on the other hand, has been used to refer to ‘writers composing in a language that is neither the writers’ native language nor the dominant language in the surrounding context’ (Cimasko & Reichelt, 2011: 3). However, given different periods of colonization as well as the global flow of Englishes, it is not so straightforward to determine whether individual writers write in their first or second language. While we recognize the multiplicity of language practices writers engage in while composing a text in their non-dominant language, for the sake of clarity we will use the term L2 writing as an umbrella term to refer to the act of writing done in an additional language (the English language, in this case). The contributors to this volume use the term second language writing to specifically refer to English instruction in a context where English is not the dominant language in the surrounding context.

References
