

# AFTERWORD: WRITING GLOBALLY, RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

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The rain clouds have moved off east toward the Sierra, but this December's storm is not finished, as new clouds are coming over the Vacas to the west and now rising over my neighbor's persimmon tree, still laden with orange fruit, though the branches are leafless. I'm enjoying the sensations of this place, this time, and thinking how this weather moves the lettuces I just planted, the hibiscus leaves now fluttering in the wind. But I'm also thinking about the message I just emailed to a researcher acquaintance in Greece who sent me a preliminary report of a longitudinal writing assessment in a social sciences course in her university. It hadn't crossed my mind (until I decided to make something of these perceptions) that there might be something clashingly weird about my sitting before a wi-fied computer in a brisk breeze off the Pacific amid the songful chatter of blue rock jays and trying to say/write something helpful and appreciative in English to a Greek internet colleague at a university where her home language is the language of instruction. But of course, until we start thinking about them, there can't be something weird about these clashes of perceptions coming from different places, because this is the world over a billion of us live in here and now.

All of us who have access to the web are continually sending or receiving complex messages via words, sound, and pictures across languages, cultures, and geographies. More and more of us billion inhabit internet locales through websites, blogs, Facebook pages, Pinterest boards, etc., that make us public—readable, interpretable. Such is our desire to build these virtual homes—to get our messages out there—that we spend relatively little worry about how we might be misinterpreted. And we think even less about the fine points of our discourses—nuances of parallel construction, commas, “who or whom?”—because if these delicacies of verbal etiquette really bothered us, we'd be driven so crazy by the unpredictability of individual readers' tastes across this busy world that we'd never have the courage to put our messages out there.

Similarly, why do I explore the web world? Frankly, I'm looking for information about myriad subjects, subjects studied by experts in different parts

of the world, who speak a wide range of first languages and whose versions of my first language, English, differ greatly from mine through influences of culture and discipline. Am I looking to see if web writers' prose matches my sense of an appropriate English dialect? Hardly. How much does it matter to me if I see that in order for a writer to reach me as an English speaker, he or she has relied on the still clumsy tool of Google Translate? Not much. I'd be much more disconcerted if the writer used his or her first language perfectly—but unintelligibly to me—rather than trying to reach me imperfectly, but so courteously, in my tongue.

This short reflection on multiple communications within simultaneous contexts in our increasingly global consciousness is pertinent, I believe, to understanding the remarkable collection of articles Michelle Cox and Terry Myers Zawacki have brought together in this anthology, which comes on the heels of the outstanding special issue of *Across the Disciplines (ATD)* that they edited in 2011: "WAC and Second Language Writing: Cross-field Research, Theory, and Program Development." Theirs is the first book collection devoted to this important focus, first pointed out by scholars such as Leki (1995), Villanueva (2001), and Johns (2001), and perhaps most emphatically stated by Leki in a series of pieces through 2008. As Cox expressed the problem in her article in the *ATD* issue, "WAC has increased emphasis on writing across undergraduate programs without creating mechanisms that help L2 students succeed as writers and without creating faculty development programs that offer training in working with L2 writers" (Cox, 2011). This collection addresses that problem through chapters that present research on multilingual student writers' strengths, coping strategies, and academic writing experiences; on faculty concerns and expectations for their L2 student writers; and on culturally sensitive WAC pedagogies and practices developed in and for US and international writing contexts.

Among the signal contributions of this collection is how it documents through surveys, interviews, and analysis of teacher responses the values and techniques that faculty bring to their reading and assessment of the writing of L2 students. Some of the news is not encouraging, as it corroborates the concerns of the critics of WAC requirements. It's important that these difficulties be documented through these studies. For example, Zawacki and Habib, in "Negotiating 'Errors' in L2 Writing: Faculty Dispositions and Language Differences," emphasize how even those faculty willing to spend a great deal of time with L2 students on their writing often take a rigidly monolingual view toward what they perceive to be error, using phrases such as "zero tolerance for error" or "blast students on errors" to describe their expectations for *all* student writers with no exceptions.

This focus on student error, however that is perceived, is corroborated in Wu Dan's "Let's see where your Chinese students come from": A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Writing in the Disciplines in China." Wu reports that the faculty in her study, who teach across disciplines at a number of Chinese universities, and all of whom require student writing in Chinese or English, focus most of their attention on perceived errors in language. She attributes this hyperawareness of students' language deficits to the teachers' lack of training in the basics of WAC pedagogy. As she says, "none of the faculty interviewees mentioned 'writing to learn,' a key concept in WAC in the US. They only focus on grading students' writing or the documents their students are to encounter in future."

The documented tendency of teachers in WAC/WID settings to emphasize the ways that non-native speakers of a language of instruction fall short of native-speaker fluency is represented in the collection by the phrase "difference as deficit." Kathryn Nielsen's essay "On Class, Race, and Dynamics of Privilege: Supporting Generation 1.5 Writers Across the Curriculum," calls this emphasis "discrimination" and describes the ways in which this discrimination is enacted by peers and instructors "in relation to peer review and group work, assessment practices, and in the social dynamics of the classroom." To put the effects of this "difference as deficit" approach bluntly, it has turned what should be an opportunity for learners to use the power of writing as a tool of thought into a trap for students who trustingly take us at our word. Where WAC theory and workshop practice have classically encouraged teachers to avoid linguistic nitpicking of student prose, too often, it seems, teachers across disciplines are allowing their discomfort with the surface of L2 student writing to get in the way of their helpfully responding to these students' explorations of ideas.

But the good news in this collection is that several of the chapters present excellent counterexamples of richer and more helpful responses to student writing by teachers across disciplines. Even more important, individual chapters present programmatic and pedagogical recommendations to modify WAC/WID practices to make programs responsive to the strengths and needs of L2 writers. These plans are founded in traditional strengths and values of WAC/WID pedagogy, but they explicitly recognize the multilinguality of students—and the reinforcing responsibilities of both teachers across disciplines and language support professionals.

In contrast to the "difference as deficit" model, the collection presents the alternative models "difference as accommodation" (Cox) and the more emphatic "difference as resource." These alternatives are embodied in chapters of two kinds in the collection, whether focused on US or international contexts: (1) those that make specific recommendations for changes in response to less

than ideal situations for L2 writers and (2) those that describe already enacted teaching practices.

“Difference as resource” recommendations include teaching practices such as those described in many of the chapters:

1. Investigate the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural demographics at one’s own institution and students’ perceptions of diversity and campus climate (see Cox; Neilsen; Zenger, Mullin, & Haviland).
2. Ask students about their linguistic and educational backgrounds and literacy histories (see Cox; Craig; DePalma & Ringer; Lavelle & Shima; Nielsen; Zenger, Mullin, & Haviland).
3. Develop course curricula, instructional approaches, and teaching-with-writing practices that take these backgrounds and histories into account (see Center & Neistepski; Craig; Dan; Du; Fernandes; Fredericksen & Mangelsdorf; Mallet & Zgheib; Neilsen; Phillips; Siczek & Shapiro; Zenger, Mullin, & Haviland).
4. Acknowledge and find ways to value cultural and linguistic diversity in responses to and assessments of student writers/writing (see Cox; Ives et al.; Lavelle & Shima; Zawacki & Habib).
5. Recognize that differences in L2 students’ texts might be purposeful adaptations on the part of the writer to attain his/her rhetorical objectives (see DePalma and Ringer).
6. Allow class time for discussions of global Englishes, valuing “accented” writing, and being inclusive of these in peer review and collaborative projects (see Cox; Fredericksen & Mangelsdorf; Lavelle & Shima; Nielsen; Phillips; Siczek & Shapiro; Zenger, Mullin, & Haviland).

In their chapter “Reconstructing Teacher Roles through a Transnational Lens: Learning with/in the American University of Beirut,” Zenger, Mullin, and Haviland delineate “difference as resource” as both a theoretical and pedagogical practice, recognizing that English is just one of many languages by which students in an increasingly multilingual environment negotiate meaning and communication across different languages—*translingually*. In that context, they argue, there is a “mismatch” between a pedagogy that focuses on students’ language deficiencies and their own observations of how much the students they were teaching “could actually do with language.” In redesigning required graduate academic writing and general education writing courses, they began by finding out what students already knew about the languages they speak and write, about the conventions they’ve been taught, and about disciplinary rhetorics. Their aim, as they write, was to foster “instruction that views English as an additional rather than replacement language, instruction that positions multilingual students as informants rather than as problems,

instruction that changes faculty's gatekeeping function to that of collaborative literacy brokers."

Revising curricula and courses to value "difference as resource" requires faculty to invest time and attention, generally in short supply at most institutions. Considering "difference as resource" from the perspective of university financial investment, Zawacki and Habib recommend that attention to student writing across disciplines be funded as part of an institution's overall international mission. Faculty can be "rewarded for engaging in inclusive pedagogies that successfully retain and teach the international populations being targeted" and workloads can be reduced "to accommodate particular curricular and pedagogical work." Moreover, "the affordances such changes also bring to L1 students negotiating an international future" should be recognized.

A chapter that demonstrates the actual embodiment of "difference as resource" pedagogy in the practices of disciplinary faculty is Lavelle and Shima's "Writing Histories: Lingua Franca English in a Swedish Graduate Program." The researchers studied 32 students from more than 20 countries on four continents, all writing history theses at Uppsala University in Sweden—as well as their teachers' responses to their writing. What distinguishes these instructors from most WAC/WID practitioners was their having taken a workshop series specifically devoted to working with multilingual writers working in English. What distinguishes the students from most enrolled in such graduate programs was their taking required coursework on thesis writing in the lingua franca of English as part of a longitudinal emphasis on their thesis-writing abilities. Lavelle and Shima attribute at least part of the students' success in completing their theses to the "difference as resource" approach used by faculty. Rather than focus on the students' still considerable lack of native-speaker fluency in the lingua franca, history instructors emphasized the content of the theses—research methods, evidence, development of ideas—in their comments on and assessment of student drafts. Students were given credit for what they knew and how their backgrounds had contributed to their knowledge. The researchers conclude that the students' success could be attributed to some "refreshingly new" factors: "assessment practices aligned with both learning goals and lingua franca communication; a research culture that values individual differences and multilingualism; and an institutional acknowledgement that enrolling international graduate students requires institutional change."

Similar to the conclusions reached by Lavelle and Shima in Sweden are those by Linda Hirsch in a US multilingual context, Hostos Community College in New York City. In "Writing Intensively: An Examination of the Performance of L2 Writers Across the Curriculum at an Urban Community College," she reports the performance of multilingual writers in writing-intensive (WI)

courses across disciplines. Noting that L2 writers earned higher grades in the specially-designed WI sections than in non-WI sections, she attributes this performance contrast both to WAC/WID pedagogies practiced in WI sections and to students “accepting the challenge” that writing-intensive classes pose. When WI classes provide opportunities for students to write to learn and make connections between writing and reading, when assignments are designed to build on one another, when students are given models, instructor feedback, and time to revise, and when faculty address students’ language needs, L2 student writers can succeed, as she shows. “The fact that ESL students are choosing to stay in WI classes with their greater demands on writing proficiencies and are passing these classes at a higher rate than their non-WI counterparts,” she argues, “indicates that participating in well-designed WI classes ... may be in and of itself an academic benefit.”

Yet another overriding message of this collection is that effective WAC/WID programs in our increasingly translanguaging world require the collaborative efforts of disciplinary teachers and language professionals and research to inform these efforts. Both the Lavelle & Shima and Hirsch examples show the vital role played by WAC/WID leaders in training disciplinary faculty in the “difference as resource” model and the ways in which they used their research findings to support the need for such training. Other chapters in the collection show diverse types of collaboration. For example, Jennifer Craig’s chapter analyzing student data from her Globally Networked Learning Environment (GNLE), a collaboration between MIT and engineering master’s students in Singapore, emphasizes the multiple roles of the L2 specialist in co-designing the successful program and conducting research to improve its outcomes. In her chapter, language professional Qian Du of Ohio University conducts a comparative study of how a specific genre, the summary, is (1) used and responded to by teachers across disciplines and (2) assigned and responded to by L2 writing teachers. Du’s essay recommends ways that the L2 teachers can collaborate with disciplinary faculty to help students understand that the summary is not so much a separate genre to be learned but “an essential literacy skill.” In his chapter, Zak Lancaster demonstrates how his findings on stance-taking in texts written by students from two different disciplines, along with interviews with instructors about their responses to the students’ authorial stances, can be used by WAC professionals in their faculty development work. In their chapter, DePalma and Ringer suggest that an awareness of “adaptive transfer,” that is the choices student writers might be consciously making to achieve their own rhetorical objectives, can be useful to faculty when they question what knowledge and skills these writers may be transferring, or not, from other writing contexts.

## ALL ENVIRONMENTS MULTI- AND TRANSLINGUAL

Some teachers may read these examples of “adaptive transfer” and “difference as resource” and wonder, “But aren’t I doing my students a disservice if I neglect their syntax errors?” To these teachers, the collection answers with examples of ways that language professionals and subject teachers across fields can include helpful commentary on syntax and other language conventions *without ignoring* larger issues of content and idea development and *without subverting* the power of the “writing to learn” approach. The Craig chapter on the US/Singapore GNLE and the chapter “Campus Internationalization: A Center-based Model for ESL-ready Programs” by Mallett and Zgheib offer successful collaborative examples between disciplinary faculty and language teachers that do just that.

But I would also ask these wondering teachers a question: can we say with utter confidence that we know the syntax that each of our students is and should be striving to achieve? Even in one small section of my course in Writing in Science, for example, I have students from many national and linguistic backgrounds, as well as from a wide array of STEM majors—biochemistry, chemical engineering, psychology, genetic counseling, biotechnology, high energy physics, plant sciences, animal sciences, geology, statistics, to name just a few. All are juniors or seniors; each is preparing for a hoped-for future in research, medicine, veterinary medicine, another type of clinical practice, a career in industry or government. Where? Mostly in the US, but not only there. And even to say “in the US” says little about the transnational and translanguistic mix of scholars and professional colleagues with whom they hope to work, even less about the patients, clients, customers, and communities among whom and for whom they might find their life’s work. Even in their relatively short lives thus far, they have encountered a remarkable range of language variations, and they will negotiate many more. If anything, we should be respecting their ability to switch codes; we should teach through our example how they might not only tolerate difference, but in fact develop their ability to read and write bravely amid a sea of different languages, accents, syntaxes, and lexicons. We would not want them to be stopped by unfamiliar sentence structures or vocabulary; so, then, why are we?

Such cross-cultures-and-languages environments that these multilingual students inhabit are the very ones that we all more and more inhabit—even in cultures where the language of instruction matches the dominant language of the people. There are at least three main reasons for this almost ubiquitous translanguality.

First, digital technology has made the diversity of peoples and cultures more familiar and reachable, as I reflected in my opening. This smaller world has

facilitated migration of students to universities in other countries. The most dramatic example of this is the Bologna Process in Europe,<sup>1</sup> illustrated in this volume by the Lavelle and Shima chapter. In the US, most colleges and universities are becoming more and more diverse in the cultural and language backgrounds of students and teachers.

Furthermore, even in academic communities that appear comparatively “monolingual,” the “language” of “writing” has been redefined by technological affordances to be multi-modal. Writers’ choices now include visuals and audio of many kinds, besides words in an amazing array of fonts, effects, and layouts—all of which can affect meaning. Social networks such as Facebook are just the most obvious exemplars of a multi-modal writing that has affected all forms of electronic communication. The “syntax” of contemporary writing involves relationships in the graphical space unknown in previous decades. (For example, what constitutes a “sentence” in a PowerPoint slide with photos or a YouTube link?)

Second, while the lingua franca of most published academic research is English, that “English” has been variegated by its exponentially increasing encounters with the grammars and lexicons of other languages. Yet this form of “code meshing” (Canagarajah’s term) is only one type; equally dramatic is the mash-up and remix that has occurred as academic research fields have multiplied and become interwoven through interdisciplinary contacts. So-called “correct English” has been redefined within increasingly esoteric communities. In a single class in “Writing in Science,” the students and I attempt to give feedback to drafts written in the distinctive, evolving, and highly challenging languages of high energy physics, genetics, medical diagnoses and treatments, seismology, environmental degradation, bacteriology, statistics science, etc.—all of these fields having emerged from the interactions (collaborations, conflicts, negotiations!) of researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds. We practice the reading of sciences in new forms of publication, such as blogs in a wide array of styles. (One of my Chinese students, a microbiologist, told me that Twitter has become an important tool for her to keep current with colleagues.) Therefore, when an academic specialist in any field judges “error” in student writing, the specialist should recognize how the disciplinary or subdisciplinary context constrains the perception of error. The specialist should not assume that marking an error will be meaningful communication to the student, because the specialist cannot assume that this error will be an error in other contexts in which the writer successfully works.

Third, the digisphere has dramatically increased the variety of readers that any connected writer can reach. This means that what constitutes “correct writing” is being constantly redefined even in a single series of responses to



email messages in a given session. The digisphere forces any writer to develop a remarkably versatile “verbal eye” in reading messages, weighing the desires and expectations of readers, and crafting appropriate responses. When a writer is fluent in multiple grammars and lexicons, and communicating with correspondents from these diverse realms, the number of reading and writing decisions made by that writer in, say, an hour on the internet, is truly staggering. Surely such writers—who include the English L2 writers in our universities—deserve respect from other writers, not a label of deficiency in language. Academic specialists across disciplines who judge the work of these students need to learn to respect their versatility as readers and writers, and give them the benefit of the doubt in weighing their linguistic decisions, as DePalma and Ringer argue in the chapter on adaptive transfer. To help faculty shift from seeing linguistic differences as deficits to a “difference-accommodated stance” and “ultimately [to] a difference-as-resource stance,” Michelle Cox’s chapter provides extensive and detailed information, materials, and suggested activities that can be used in working with faculty on approaches to L2 writers and writing.

## **MAKING WAC/WID WORK FOR MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS (IN A TRANSLINGUAL WORLD)**

Several of the chapters in their critique of US (or Chinese, as in the Wu essay) teachers’ approaches to linguistic differences call for more emphasis on writing-to-learn techniques and on larger structural (higher order) criteria in training of teachers to read and respond to student work. The Lancaster chapter for example gives a program based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) for faculty training in genre. What’s remarkable in this call is that these training ideas have been around for many years and have been a staple of WAC workshops, but this volume especially emphasizes the need for such strategies with L2 students in an environment where the L1 of the teachers dominates.

Most basically, as this collection teaches, making WAC/WID work in our translanguaging world means appreciating the multilinguality of L2 students. Even the most “struggling with English” student in a class taught in English in a US university has achieved technical fluency in the language, even though that person has not reached native-speaker fluency nor a polished academic voice. Since that student is likely to be able to communicate in at least one other spoken language, that student brings to any subject linguistic and cultural depth that a monolingual teacher or student does not possess. Teachers of any subject can ask themselves how that depth can be brought to bear in understanding and illuminating the subject—as well as in communicating its important messages

to other linguistic communities. For example, a multilingual (Thai/English) student from a farm background in Thailand, majoring in biochemistry and specializing in plant breeding, brings to my science writing course a cultural/environmental depth that not only enriches her studies and prepares her for varied futures, but that also can illuminate the studies of others in the subject. But she can only be a resource for others if her teachers, including me, provide opportunities for her writing (or talk) to develop connections between environments that she can share with others.

Particularly in a writing class, that depth in multilingual students gives the writer access to audiences, settings, and purposes of writing (the full rhetorical triangle) that can't be accessed by monolingual English speakers, no matter how fluent. That most of our writing classes in US English departments and writing programs have ignored the translingual resources that these students bring to the course shows our fixation on the normative task of "teaching English," rather than encouraging all our students, monolingual and multilingual, to consider how writing, rhetoric, and new communication technologies cross linguo-cultural borders.

In co-editing with an international team the anthology *Writing Programs Worldwide: Profiles of Academic Writing in Many Places* (2012), I've been privileged to meet teachers who exemplify this linguo-cultural border crossing. Essays from 28 countries on six continents present examples of teachers who use multilingual resources in teaching across disciplines. For example, Désirée Motta-Roth of the Federal University of Santa Maria (UFSM) in Brazil, drawing on her research on the writing demands on undergraduate and graduate students in diverse fields, stresses the need for a genre- and rhetorically-based curriculum that can broaden the typically narrow assumption that skilled language use means only perfection of form (Motta-Roth, 2012). Her emphasis on this broader approach is essential, she writes, because students and teachers at UFSM write in both Portuguese and English, with scholarship in Portuguese seen by many as important both toward reaching a Portuguese-speaking readership and as "resistance to [the] 'academic hegemony'" (p. 108) of English publication. Her teaching and research foreground student consciousness of the everyday ways that genre and rhetoric are intrinsic to their working in both languages.

An equally striking but different example comes from Otto Kruse of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences, who profiles the School of Translation at his university (Kruse, 2012). Since Switzerland is a country with four official languages (German, French, Italian, and Romansh) and a fifth, English, as an increasingly important lingua franca, Kruse describes how translation studies

have changed from a paradigm of proficiency in separate languages (“pure’ language skills”) to “a model of multilingual literacy,” where the norm has become the “co-existence” of different languages and practices for individuals (p. 404). As a result, translators can no longer demonstrate proficiency by successfully translating documents from language to language, but must develop “meta-linguistic abilities” that cross languages as well as genres (p. 406).

While these two chapters from my collection as well as exemplar chapters by Zenger, Mullin, and Haviland and Lavelle and Shima in this volume describe programs at institutions outside of the US, they offer model approaches, practices, and perspectives that we in the US can strive to achieve. Which, ultimately, is the goal of this anthology.

## THE LAST WORD

WAC/WID has always been about flexibility amid diversity. From its earliest days as a formal “movement” in the 1970s, it has been about respecting the differences among disciplines: appreciating the diverse learning methods of physicists and painters, the distinctive vocabularies and syntaxes of mathematicians and anthropologists, the esoteric genres of chemists and musicologists. More recently, it has been about widening an already wide circle to accept the capabilities of new technologies for learning and communication. The basic motive of “writing across the curriculum” has been to *learn* from all disciplines the most productive ways by which writing can be a tool, a vehicle, a force for increased and more expansive learning and communication, and then to *share* those methods across all fields.

Though WAC/WID has focused on disciplinary differences, its inherent flexibility of approach makes it an ideal construct to appreciate the diversity of language backgrounds of both students and teachers. Because the best-known WAC/WID practices, as espoused in these chapters, give priority to diverse ways and tools of learning, they can be used productively in translinguistic contexts—the new norm in education. What is truly exciting about collections such as this is that by illuminating the confluence of disciplinary diversity and multilinguality, we will never again think of WAC as “only” about the content and methods of academic disciplines. Indeed, we need to reconceive the idea of “the discipline,” just as we have reconceived the idea of “writing,” as evolving within an ever-richer global mix of languages, technologies, ways of thinking, and desires for expression.

## NOTES

1. See the official website of the Bologna Process 2010-2012 (<http://www.chea.info/>)

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