President's Letter

Dear NYS TESOL members, colleagues and friends,

Welcome to the spring 2018 edition of *Idiom*. As always, I would like to express my gratitude to all the writers, who took the time out of their busy lives to write for the newsletter.

These last few months have been especially difficult for our English Language Learners and educators due to several federal policies coming into effect. Having said that, our Business Manager, Cynthia Wiseman and Vice President of Advocacy, Carmen Diaz attended TESOL International Advocacy and Policy Summit in Washington D.C. to raise awareness to some of these issues at Capitol Hill. NYS TESOL would also like to release the following statement:

"NYS TESOL joins with state Board of Regents and other national and international organizations such as the ACLU and the United Nations in condemning, and demanding an immediate halt to the policy of family separation enacted against immigrant families.

As an educational advocacy organization that recognizes the rights of children to justice, safety, healthy conditions, and nurturing, and as educators, families and allies of people who are often immigrants, we unequivocally denounce this inhuman, cruel treatment of our fellow human beings."

Finally, I once again urge you to simply not be members but be ACTIVE members in the organization. Get involved!!! Stay up to date on new information, help NYS TESOL be your voice to advocate for our students and others. As always, your comments, concerns and inquiries are welcome. Please feel free to email me at pres@nystesol.org to find out how you can get more involved in the organization and make a difference.

Yours in NYS TESOL,

Ravneet Parmar

President, NYS TESOL

ESL Instructor, Adelphi International, Adelphi University

*Promising Practices – This is an ongoing column featuring advice for effective teaching. Please
send article submissions to the column editor, Ann C. Wintergerst at*
promisingpractices@idiom.nystesol.org

Sharing Stories through Profile Essays

By Jeanne M. Hughes and Selina Marcille

> *"We are caught in time, we experience our lives as a movement through time,
> and we tell stories to give shape and meaning to this passage" (Newkirk, 2014, p.5).*

Laughter sounds from the back of the room. Excited voices clamor together over a new mutual
interest. Faces tinged with eager fascination can be seen throughout the classroom. Twenty-
seven students from two composition classes are separated into pairs and one group of three.
They are taking notes and asking questions. They are sharing social media on their phones and
laughing together. The plan was to combine one teacher's *Fundamentals of Writing for
International Students* class with the other teacher's *College Composition* class for students to
conduct cross-cultural interviews and write profile essays. At the whiteboard, two English
teachers wait and watch the time tick closer to the end of the class period, excited about the
connections, conversations, and collaboration happening, all before 9:00 a.m. on a Monday
morning.

Two Different Classes
This class took place at a university with an International student population of over 10% of the
student body. *Fundamentals of Writing for International Students* is a developmental writing
class for International students who are coming from our university's bridge program.
Throughout the bridge program, students have other International students as their classmates.
Students take the Fundamentals class with only International students, but at the same time, it is
the first semester when they are interacting with native-English speaking students (domestic
students) in their other classes. Once students complete the Fundamentals course, they move on
to *College Composition,* the university's first-year writing class where International and
domestic students are joined in one class. Students can be at the university for eighteen months
before they take classes with domestic students. This makes the transition to those
heterogeneous classes difficult.

As teachers of both *Fundamentals of Writing for International Students* and *College
Composition*, we have seen International students self-segregate, sitting in a corner of the room

and being passive learners. When more than one International student is in a class with mostly domestic students, the International students often form a small group and communicate in their own language if possible, reducing their opportunities for working on speaking English. They tend to stay within their comfort zone. At the same time, domestic students are just entering their undergraduate career. They have made connections with other domestic students through orientation sessions and dormitory life. Since many International students live off-campus, the two groups do not cross paths often outside of the classroom, and opportunities to learn are lost.

Anxiety
Anxiety is a problem for International students learning English (Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomas, 2014). They do not want to volunteer their ideas aloud because they may not be right, or they may be worried about how they look to other students (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). One thing that is good for ELL students is when the teachers collaborate with a focus on making English language learning strategies an integral part of mainstreamed classrooms (Ferris, 2009). Knowing this, we decided that collaboration between the two classes would be a great way to address some of the concerns of the Fundamentals students, while also supporting cross cultural exchange.

As their composition teachers, we wanted students to share their stories because stories offer a way for people to communicate. This ties in closely with the idea of developing curriculum as both a window and a mirror (Style, 1996). This collaboration was a great opportunity not only to allow students to look into the mirror and see pieces of their own reality reflected in their fellow multicultural students, but also to glimpse through the window and see the reality of others outside of themselves. It was with this in mind that we came up with the profile essay assignment for our two classes. We wanted to address student anxiety by giving International students a low-stakes opportunity to interact with domestic students. Students in the Fundamentals class were not yet connected to many domestic students in the campus community, and we wanted to give both classes new opportunities to learn.

The Profile Essay
To prepare for the profile assignment, each class discussed interviewing skills. Students were then asked what they would like to know about another person. Students generated lists with several open-ended questions (See Appendix). Because initiating conversation with domestic students can be difficult, the prepared questions gave them each support for what to say and pushed them beyond surface level discussions. The preparation of the questions gave the Fundamentals students an opportunity to talk about what they wondered about domestic cultures

and behaviors. It also gave them the chance to voice their concerns. They were hesitant when creating questions. They did not feel that asking so many questions was appropriate until they were reminded of the first assignment of the semester where all students introduced themselves through an essay and oral presentation, which culminated in the other students asking deeper questions. This framework helped mitigate their concerns around cultural norms. The domestic students were also curious. They wanted to know about the International students and their experiences, but they were also college freshmen with their own anxiety. Having a planned assignment gave them the freedom to start these conversations.

Armed with their questions, the two classes met. As their teachers, we expected to be circulating throughout the classroom prompting discussions. Once the students met though, that expectation proved to be wrong. Students took turns asking questions. They wrote down answers and kept talking. They took out their phones and connected on social media. International students asked domestic students about campus life and culture. They asked questions about words and expressions that were unfamiliar. Domestic students asked about the International students' countries, homes, and cultures. As notes were being written, students were able to clarify ideas with each other, working on their writing skills. This assignment fostered continued connections with offers of help for future writing assignments made by some of the domestic students. We listened in on conversations, but we were not needed for prompting. Glimpses in mirrors and through windows were happening naturally as stories were being told. We heard a lively discussion about favorite soccer teams and upcoming matches. Two other students were discussing social events outside of school and making plans to meet.

The class period ended, but the assignment did not stop there. Contact information was exchanged in case the students had any more questions for each other since each student had to take what was learned from the partner and write a short profile essay. Upon return to their own classrooms, students referred to their "new friend" as they wrote their essays.

Conclusion

We wanted to combine classes for multiple reasons. It was a way for Fundamentals students to practice their English speaking skills and see into the College Composition class they would be taking next. It also empowered both sets of students to start cross-cultural conversations. There were simple goals behind the assignment, but the students gained so much more. The excitement in the classroom on that day showed the genuine interest of the students in each other's stories and lives. This assignment broke down cultural barriers and opened new doors as students followed their curiosity and engaged in lively discussions with their new friends.

References

Ferris, D. (2009). Teaching college writing to diverse student populations. Ann Arbor, MI: The
    University of Michigan Press.

Newkirk, T. (2014). *Minds made for stories*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2013). *The ELL writer*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Shapiro, S., Farrelly, R., & Tomas, Z. (2014). Fostering International student success in higher
    education. Alexandria, VA: TESOL International Association.

Style, E. (1996). Curriculum as window and mirror. Retrieved from
    https://nationalseedproject.org/about-us/timeline/26-latest-articles/41-curriculum-as-
    window-and-mirror

Jeanne Hughes, Ed.D., is an Assistant Professor of English at Southern New Hampshire
University where she teaches composition. She currently serves as the interim coordinator of
first-year writing, which includes the writing class where International students transition from
the bridge program into the undergraduate school. <j.hughes@snhu.edu>

Selina Marcille, MA, MFA, is the Writing Tutoring Coordinator at Southern New Hampshire
University where she teaches English to undergraduate students and has worked to develop new
programs and initiatives in writing tutoring programs for all students with a large emphasis on
English Language Learners. <s.marcille@snhu.edu>

Appendix

Profile Essay Questions

- What is your name?
- Where are you from?
- What languages do you speak?
- What made you choose this school?
- What year are you in school?
- What is your major?

- What is your career goal?
- What are your hobbies?
- What kind of food do you like to eat?
- What do you do in your free time around campus?
- Where did you grow up and did you like it there?
- Who had the greatest influence on you during your childhood?
- What is your favorite class and why?
- Where do you see yourself in seven years?
- Who is the most inspirational person you know?
- Where do you want to travel?
- If you won the lottery, what would you do?
- What do you think your biggest accomplishment is?
- What nicknames do you have?
- What's one thing about you that very few people know?
- What did you want to be when you grew up? Is it what you are doing now?
- What's the most valuable life lesson you've learned?
- What types of things interest you?
- What's your favorite quote?
- Three words to describe yourself and why?
- Have you ever traveled outside of the United States?
- Do you have any international friends?

Foreign Language Anxiety

By Sekinah Nasiri and Geri Marquez

Learning a second language is a complex process that involves many different variables (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991). One of the most important variables that influences second language learning is anxiety. Anxiety is defined as a subjective feeling, which includes tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that is associated with arousal of the nervous system (Spielberger, 1983). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety in the foreign language acquisition process is a "phenomenon related to but distinguishable from other specific anxieties" (p. 129). Many teachers and parents are familiar with test anxiety and public speaking anxiety; however, most educators and parents are not familiar with foreign language (FL) anxiety (Horwitz & Young, 1991).

Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) first provided conceptual foundations to understand FL anxiety by outlining language anxiety in three components: (a) communication apprehension, which is "a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people" (p.127); (b) test anxiety, which is defined as a type of performance nervousness generated from a fear of failure towards academic evaluation; and (c) fear of negative evaluation, which is considered as someone's avoidance of evaluative situations, apprehension, and expectation of negative evaluations from others. The experience of anxiety in the English language learning classroom is a fundamental issue for learners since it may affect academic performance and the development of advance L2 language and literacy skills. Educators must attempt to address FL anxiety to help language learners and refugee students develop feelings of safety and positivity in language learning experiences (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). A way in which to do this is by teaching and applying coping strategies in the classroom. In this article, we suggest a variety of strategies to eliminate emotional anxiety and linguistic anxiety.

Strategies to Cope with FL Anxiety

Mini Conferences Teachers should prepare an anxiety survey or group interview at the beginning of the semester to identify and gain insight about students who might experience anxiety in classroom and may need more support. Based on students' responses, teachers can schedule a private mini conference with language learners. Mini conferences provide opportunities for teachers to become familiar with students thoughts, challenges, needs, and emotional conflicts.

Interview Activity and Movie Talk. Teachers may also benefit from exploring low stake activities such as the interview activity and movie talk. The first strategy, interview activity, provide opportunities for language learners to alleviate anxiety levels as well as practicing speaking language skills in non-threatening way. For instance, during the first part of the interview activity, students practice speaking and listening with their classmates in the classroom under the supervision of the teacher class. Similarly the movie talk is another helpful strategy for students in beginner and intermediate grade levels to work in pairs and use their linguistic skills. Here the teacher chooses part of a movie and shows it to students more than once to build up confidence and practice the concepts such as predicting, inferencing, and making conclusions as well as pushing their descriptive language. First, the movie is muted to slowly introduce the content to the students and allow them to guess about the interactions between the characters. Then the students watch it a second time with sound with the teacher pausing it occasionally to check on the students' understanding as they also develop sentences explaining what they saw. s. Each of these activities rely on the development of comfortable, safe space that involves minimal risk; thus, increasing opportunities for all learners to participate.

Anxiety relief circle Teachers can assign time, possibly at the end of class, for students with anxiety to talk about their experiences with it, its causes and share or develop ideas and strategies for how they cope with it. As an introduction or an extension of the circle, teachers can ask students to prepare a journal about their weekly goals, future plans, and reflect different types of anxiety that they experience during class time. Here they can reflect on their thoughts to help solve problems and eliminate the anxiety they experience. By reflecting on their feelings and engaging with others, this anxiety relief circle might help students feel they are not the only person who experiences foreign language anxiety, encourage students to become connected with peers, and assist them to engage in the classroom environment, all things that will help to decrease the students' FL anxiety.

Conclusion

Foreign language anxiety greatly influences the language learning process. Teachers should not consider language learners with anxiety as lazy, lacking motivation, or having poor behavior. Instead, teachers should learn to respect their students' feelings, value their emotions, and peruse strategies to help reduce feelings of anxiety in order to help language learners to become successful in their careers and personal lives. Additionally, teachers should consider themselves as lifelong researchers who observe and reevaluate their teaching process and look for different theory and activities to optimize their teaching quality and students' achievement.

References

Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal, 70*(2), 125-132.

Horwitz, E. K. & Young, D. J. (1991). Language anxiety from theory and research to classroom implications. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentiss-Hall.

Spielberger, C. D. (1983). *Manual for the state-trait anxiety inventory (STAI-From Y)*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologist Press.

Young, D. J. (1992). Language anxiety form the foreign language specialist perspective: Interactive with Krashen, Omagggio Hadley, Terrel, and Rubin. *Foreign Language Annuals, 25*, 157-172.

Sekineh Nasiri has taught ESL courses to refugee and immigrant ELL students in the Greater Houston Area (Houston Community College), as well as Bilingual Education in her native country of Iran. She holds a Masters degree in Multicultural Studies with a specialization in ESL from the University of Houston and is currently an Ed.D candidate in Literacy at Sam Houston State University. Her research interests include but are not limited to, strategies for adult refugee learners, literature circles and mini lessons for ELL students, and adult ELL foreign language anxiety. She can be reached at snn015@shsu.edu

Geri Marquez is an English Language Arts/Reading teacher at Woodridge Forest Middle School, Porter, TX. She has also taught as courses in Integrated Reading and Writing at Sam Houston State University. Ms. Marquez holds a M.Ed in ESL from Texas A&M University and is currently an doctoral candidate in Literacy at Sam Houston State University. She can be reached at gxm030@shsu.edu

The Art of Summarizing: Using Summary Writing to Develop Reading Comprehension Skills

By Mabel Batista and Melissa Valerie

Summarizing can be a daunting task for students at any level, but it is especially difficult for students who are struggling readers. Students who struggle to read also struggle to write and many of the cognitive skills required to produce good, clear writing are inherent in the reading process. Summary writing emphasizes the interrelation between reading and writing and contributes to students' cognitive development by advancing their reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary (Gao, 2013). Furthermore, summary writing allows students to develop cognitive skills such as analyzing, synthesizing, generalizing, and categorizing (Lambert, 1984).

We had the opportunity to present on the topic of summarizing at the 39th Annual NYC ABE Conference this spring where we demonstrated our pedagogical approaches to using summary writing in our classrooms. We believe that it is important for instructors to provide explicit instructions for summary writing in order for students to produce clear and concise summaries that accurately convey what they have read. Our presentation demonstrated the following three procedures which are meant to provide students with direct instruction in summary writing.

One-Sentence Summaries

The first technique we demonstrated utilized a short, easy to read, high-interest text that students read once silently, then again aloud as a class. Text genre and characteristics are important when choosing texts that are accessible to students, particularly students who are learning to summarize for the first time (Anderson & Hidi, 1989). We found that narrative and informational texts work best because they offer structures that are easier to follow. After students have read the text, group them in pairs and assign one paragraph from the text to each pair of students. Have students work to summarize their assigned paragraph into a one-sentence summary. Chunking the text this way allows students to feel more accomplished because they are working on a small portion of the text, which also makes the process of summarizing more manageable at this stage. Subsequently, this activity allows students to learn to negotiate and debate main ideas while referring back to the text thus promoting re-reading. Pairs can then be grouped by assigned paragraphs to compare their one-sentence summaries and discuss similarities and differences, important information that has been omitted, or unimportant information that has been overstated.

GIST

The second approach we discussed during our presentation was an activity called the GIST. While there are many variations of this activity, the version we demonstrated requires students to write a summary of an article in 20 words or less. Using the same text from the one-sentence summary activity, the reader is tasked with first identifying the who, what, where, when, why, and how as a means to extract the most important ideas in the text. The extracted information is then used to write a summary that presents the "gist" of the article. The goal of this activity is to help students learn how to locate main ideas, identify supporting details, and condense information. In addition to helping students develop skills like sentence combining, paraphrasing and editing, this activity also promotes revisioning skills. Because the GIST is short, it also allows teachers to quickly and easily monitor and assess students' comprehension of the text.

Summary Templates

The third approach that we discussed was the use of a summary template. The template, (Summary Template) provides students with a framework or structure that can be used to help them organize their summary. Acting as a kind of graphic organizer, the template we used prompts students to include key features of a summary like: article title, author, and main idea. Instructors can easily tailor summary templates to fit a particular text genre or assignment. Our template, for example, required students to use "summary verbs" which help convey the tone or action of the author. We provided our students with a list of summary verbs to help them move away from standard phrases like "he says" or "she believes." While phrases like these are practical, students often overuse these phrases and fail to accurately capture what the author of the text is saying (Graff & Birkenstein, 2006).

Conclusion

It is important to note that learning to write summaries takes time and patience on both the part of the student and the instructor. Students' initial inclination when writing summaries is often to include their own feelings and opinions or write what Graff & Birkenstein refer to as "list summaries" which "simply inventory the original author's various points" without regard for the main point the author is making (2006, p.33). However, there are many instructional advantages that far outweigh what can often feel like a time consuming process. We observed that after having multiple encounters with the three pedagogical practices described here, our students' reading comprehension improved and they were more dedicated to revising their drafts as they became more aware of their own metacognition. Through the processes of rereading and

revising, which summarization demands, students were also more adept at recalling content area material as they had interacted with the texts multiple times. They also took a more dialectic approach during class discussions of the materials they had read. Moreover, our students became active readers while also improving their writing.

References

Anderson, V., & Hidi, S. (1988). Teaching students to summarize. *Educational leadership*, *46*(4), 26-28.

Gao, Y. (2013). The effect of summary writing on reading comprehension: the role of mediation in EFL classroom. *Reading Improvement*, *50*(2), 43-47.

Graff, G., Birkenstein, C., & Durst, R. (2006). *"They say/I say": the moves that matter in academic writing*. New York: WW Norton.

Lambert, J. R. (1984). Summaries: a focus for basic writers. *Journal of Developmental Education*, *8*(2), 10.

Mabel Batista is a core reading and writing instructor for CUNY Start at Bronx Community College, Bronx, N.Y. She holds an M.A in Language and Literacy. She can be reached at mbamadi@gmail.com.

Melissa Valerie is a reading and writing instructor at the SUNY Manhattan Equal Opportunity Center, Harlem, N.Y. She holds an M.A in Language and Literacy. She can be reached at melissacvalerie@gmail.com.

A Practical Framework for Incorporating Critical Thinking in ELT

By Mary Ritter and Abby Porter Mack

A key 21st-century skill, critical thinking plays an ever-increasing role in the language teacher's curriculum. Wanting a systematic framework for critical thinking, we have adopted Stephen Brookfield's formula and applied it to the ESL classroom. Using this framework, students create and test different interpretations of scenarios, not only learning to become more interculturally competent but also improving their communication skills in the target language (Rfaner, 2006).

Although most of us have an intuitive understanding of what critical thinking is, we tend to be influenced by our own academic backgrounds when formulating it. Brookfield (2011) identifies at least five traditions of critical thinking deriving from analytic philosophy, the natural sciences, pragmatism, psychoanalysis, and critical theory. Taking the best from these, Brookfield's framework involves three phases: the first examines the assumptions guiding an individual's decisions and actions; the second checks these assumptions against research and inquiry; and the third crafts a decision or interpretation based on these researched assumptions. Using Brookfield's framework, we wrote short scenarios that presented characters caught in conflicts shaped by cultural assumptions. We guided our students through Brookfield's three phases, which not only sharpened their critical thinking skills, but improved their intercultural competence, as well.

In one of several classes featuring this approach, students read the following scenario and discussed the accompanying questions in small groups. Many students initially wanted to jump straight to evaluation and assign blame to one of the characters, but a key step in developing intercultural competence is suspending judgement long enough to gather relevant information (Nam & Condon 2010). By having our students' focus on assumptions, pushed them toward deeper analysis. Some students struggled with Cantara's reluctance to speak to her professor; others stepped in to explain ways those with less power indirectly criticize or seek redress from those with more. They puzzled over how Cyrus could research his assumptions, but often suggested such things as speaking to another professor from the same cultural background as Cantara about her actions or inviting a class discussion about grading options for group assignments later in the semester. After working through the first two questions, students generally made more nuanced interpretations of the actions of both characters. Over time, students got better at generating the assumptions, suspending judgment and exploring the scenarios from different perspectives.

Scenario One: In her Master's program, Cantara was unhappy about having to work with two other students on an assignment that would be given a single grade based on the group's joint effort. Instead of talking to Cyrus, the professor of the class, Cantara went to the chair of the department to complain about Cyrus's assignment and unfair grading policy. The chair told Cantara to talk to Cyrus about the problem. The chair later called Cyrus into her office to discuss the situation, giving him a heads-up about his disgruntled student. Cyrus felt upset about Cantara's going above his head to talk to his chair. He felt as if he had set up his class in a way that encouraged students to talk to him and visit him during his office hours with questions and concerns. In addition to providing his email address and phone number to students and inviting them to contact him with questions, he had even organized an informal lunch outing with his students. As a result of these efforts, he felt as if he had provided students ample opportunities to dialogue with him. As an adjunct, Cyrus was worried about the impression this would leave on the chair. As Cantara never did talk to him directly, Cyrus felt he could never defend his policy directly to the student. He pretended that he did not know about Cantara's complaining to his chair and simply treated her with careful formality for the rest of the semester.

Questions

What assumptions is Cyrus operating under? List as many as you can.
Of the assumptions you have listed, which ones could Cyrus check by simple research and inquiry?
Give an alternative interpretation of this scenario. This should be a version of what is happening that is consistent with the events described but that you think Cyrus would disagree with.

We then led the whole class in a discussion about the language that emerged while talking about the scenarios, the process of interpretation, and the common dimensions of intercultural difference. Finally, we distributed a Critical Incident Questionnaire (Brookfield, 1995), with questions about the students feelings during the discussion to gather reflections about and affective perceptions of their learning. These questionnaires usually uncovered the extent students recognized they had learned from one another and revealed the power of thinking together and constructing collective knowledge.

This approach has been successful with intermediate and high intermediate learners in an Intensive English Program and an Academic English Program. By adjusting the scenarios, though, this approach could be adapted for lower levels: scenarios featuring easier vocabulary and sentence structure, as well as those with fewer possible avenues of interpretation would be

suitable. Turning the scenarios into role plays with parts for each character as well as a narrator would make it easier for students to speak in the first person about their character's motivations and behavior and to compare the limitations of each character's point of view with that of the narrator. This could be especially useful to do with beginning or lower intermediate students because they generally find it easier to speak in the first person rather than the third or impersonally.

In teaching critical thinking, of course, teachers can focus on several different language objectives, but we found that as students analyzed the scenarios guided by Brookfield's questions, they participated in abstract and speculative discussions that naturally involved modals, conditionals, and qualified language. For our students, working through speculation and uncertainty to negotiate meaning with their peers, allowed them to move up the ladder of proficiency and grow into better critical thinkers.

References

Brookfield, Stephen D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Brookfield, Stephen D. (2011). *Teaching for critical thinking: Tools and techniques to help students question their assumptions*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Nam, K-A, & Condon, J. (2009). The DIE is cast: The continuing evolution of intercultural communication's favorite classroom exercise. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. *34*(1), 81-87.

Numrich, Carol. (2013). Teaching critical thinking from both the psychologists' and philosophers' perspectives. *Always ESL Newsletter.* Retrieved from http://longmanhomeusa.com/blog/teaching-critical-thinking-from-both-the-psychologists-and-philosophers-perspectives/

Rfaner, S. (2006). Enhancing thinking skills in the classroom. *Humanity & Sciences Journal*, *1*(1), 28-36.

Mary Ritter is a language lecturer in the American Language Institute at New York University in Manhattan. The recent winner of an NYU-SPS Teaching Excellence Award, she specializes in teaching listening and speaking, pronunciation, intercultural communication, and presentation

skills. She can be reached at mkr3@nyu.edu.

Abby Porter Mack is a language lecturer in the American Language Institute at New York University. She has a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics from Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include second language literacy, second language assessment, and CALL. She can be reached at abby.porter@nyu.edu.

Help Students Find Their Voices - Overuse Texts

By Genie Smiddy

Writing academically has its own special peculiarities that even native speakers struggle with, so for those learning to write academically in another language it becomes exponentially more difficult. Essentially, these students are being asked to write in unfamiliar rhetorical modes all while incorporating sources that are rife with new and increasingly obscure and subject-specific vocabulary. It is truly no wonder that so many students "borrow" the words of others to seem more academically fluent. Out of insecurity, lack of vocabulary, time constraints or possibly most controversially because it is part of the learning process, students will patchwrite (Howard, 1995) or lift words and phrases from a source text verbatim without attribution, from time to time. As people we understand the impulse, but as teachers, we must encourage students to write academically while keeping their unique voices. Though as teachers we often advocate for variety and student –chosen texts to encourage engagement and motivation, to help students become comfortable with their sources and their voices as writers, it may be necessary to **initially** limit students' choices of sources to purposefully "overuse" them.

There has been much research into why and how students, particularly L2 students, "plagiarize." Many studies have focused on the mechanical or cultural reasons for students' borrowing and have suggested possible solutions (Shi, 2006). Making students aware of the importance of attributing the ideas or words of others and greater clarity and intention in teaching research and citation skills have been the major solutions proposed by some researchers. However, others have made it clear that plagiarism is not always an intentional act to deceive but more a learning process that allows the student to try out academic structures and vocabulary as their own and in many cases may be borrowing the words and not the ideas of other authors (Howard, 1995; Pecorari and Shaw, 2012; Shi, 2012). There have also been other studies that focus on the disparate attitudes of certain disciplines about what does or doesn't need to be paraphrased and cited as well as what counts as plagiarism at all adding to the difficulty of parsing how and when a student is unlawfully "borrowing"(Shi 2012). Most of the research focuses on what the student did and how it is evaluated but not enough on what the student thought about in making those choices. So much more research into what the student intends when s/he is borrowing text needs to be done for there to be a conversation that is based more on evidence than educated guesses (Pecorari, 2015; Pecorari and Shaw, 2012).

From my own experience, my guess is that most L2 students do not intentionally commit outright plagiarism. Most, if not all, tend to borrow for two reasons: lack of comprehension of

the source text(s) or lack of sufficiently sophisticated vocabulary to sound "academic." These issues are linked through vocabulary and time. Students need time to understand fully what they read to be able to rephrase it in their own words/voice. However to do this, they often use vocabulary they are comfortable with but is, according to them, not academic enough. As teachers, we need to give students the time to struggle with how they want to use others' ideas in a way that represents their true abilities and voices as writers. In order to do that, teachers may need to restrict choice and heavily re-use texts at the beginning to allow students freedom later when they are more confident in their writing.

While many teachers like to allow students to choose topics and sources to keep them interested, if the goal of the assignment is to teach them to use sources faithfully, then confining their choices becomes essential. At this point, teachers need to know what the sources are about, how they impart their points of view, what possible sources they incorporate and how and most importantly, what the sources do not say and do. Because the teacher's and the students' comprehension of the readings' content and rhetorical strategies are integral to the ability to write about and with these sources, using a myriad of texts is unmanageable for everyone. Using a text in multiple ways and to model or practice multiple strategies or skills is one way to ensure that comprehension is deeper and makes it possible for better integration of the sources into an original piece of writing. Choosing one text to be read, discussed, outlined, paraphrased, deconstructed for structure, and reacted to, ensures a great amount of understanding of the text itself, recycles key vocabulary, practices reported speech, signal phrases and attribution and leads to a student who is more in control of how to express their opinions and how they interact with or are supported by those of the text. When it is time for students to interact with two sources, they must have as much comprehension of that source as the first, so they should follow a similar process though an abbreviated one since they should have developed some of the skills they need.

This process leaves out so many other steps/obstacles/necessities to helping students use sources and write in a way that emphasizes and not erodes their voices. Not the least of which are providing effective, focused assignments, finding suitable sources for their level, making students aware of discipline-specific academic structures, using signal phrases and citation, learning how to take good notes on their sources in order to paraphrase and synthesize effectively…. Those are subjects for another day. One strategy alone will not change students' confidence, but it may be a small step toward giving them the control they need to develop their academic voices in their new language.

References

Howard, R.M. (1995). Plagiarisms, authorships, and the academic death penalty. *College English 57,* 788-805.

Pecorari, D. (2015). Plagiarism in second language writing: Is it time to close the case? *Journal of Second Language Writing 30* 94–99

Pecorari, D. and Shaw, P. (2012). Types of student intertextuality and faculty attitudes. *Journal of Second Language Writing 21,* 149-164.

Shi, L. (2006). Cultural Backgrounds and textual appropriation. *Language Awareness 15,* 264-282.

Genie Smiddy is a Senior Language Educator at St. John's University and has taught English for academic purposes since 2014. During that time, she also taught freshman composition at Hunter College. She can be reached at smiddye@stjohns.edu.