

From the Editor

This winter publication of *MEXTESOL Journal* marks the first time in MEXTESOL's history that an issue has been devoted to one specific topic. I am honored to have edited this landmark in MEXTESOL's history and pleased to present: **Issues in ESL/EFL Writing.**

You might ask, why was *writing* chosen? I would like to offer some compelling reasons. One reason for choosing writing is that, while other areas have been researched throughout the history of ESL/EFL methodology, ESL/EFL writing was the last "skill" to receive attention. It wasn't until the late 1970s that serious studies began to research how L2 learners write. Indeed, this void is evident in a cursory look through back issues of *MEXTESOL Journal* or *TESOL Quarterly*. Since 1980, this has changed, and while many publications have focused on writing in the past decade, there is still much work to be done before we fully understand the complex nature of second language writing.

Another reason for choosing L2 writing for this special issue is that the evaluation of ESL/EFL students' abilities is often accomplished through their writing. Many times language students are placed in a particular class because of their ability to express themselves in written English. As one example I will offer the TWE (Test of Written English) portion of the TOEFL test, the most potent of placement tests. Also, most US institutions use standardized writing tests as the basis for placement in English classes.

The final reason I can offer for focusing on writing centers on the concept that when we teach students how to write we teach them how to think. The cognitive and social skills needed to express oneself clearly on paper are multi-faceted and highly complex. To express oneself in a second language compounds these issues immeasurably.

The seven articles in this special issue highlight the reasons for choosing writing as our focus and reflect questions teachers have about ESL/EFL writers. These questions include:

- What special problems do students have when writing in L2?
- How do ESL/EFL students learn how to write and how is it different from learning to write in L1?
- What are the best ways to teach writing and revision?
- What are native-speaker perceptions of ESL/EFL writers?
- What do studies of L1 literacy add to our understanding of L2 reading and writing abilities?

The seven articles in this special issue represent a number of these concerns in teaching ESL/EFL.

In the **Research** section, there are four articles, each dealing with a different component of student writing. The first article, written by Heather Boldt, Maria Ines Valsecchi, and Sara Cushing Weigle of Georgia State University, deals with the differences in evaluation of ESL/EFL students' writing by US content area and ESL professors. Next, Saul Santos Garcia (Universidad Autonoma de Nayarit) focuses on the important, yet under-examined, issue of contrastive rhetoric. His research rhetorically analyzes the differences between the compositions of Spanish and English writers. The implications for teaching Spanish-speakers how to write in English represent a significant contribution to the field. The third essay (Di Puma & Maslekoff, Georgia State University) reports on a study which looked at how EFL students perceive teacher feedback and decide which teacher comments to attend to in revising. The fourth essay by Brenda Sansom-Moorey Georgia State University, focuses on teacher-student conferences as part of a reading-writing component in a US graduate class.

In the **Professional Concerns** section, we have three articles, each dealing with an important issue in teaching ESL/EFL. In the first of these articles, Jenny Mounsey (Indiana University of Pennsylvania) deals with a sensitive and important issue for students worldwide, plagiarism. The issue of what constitutes plagiarism when writing in English is one tied up with cultural attitudes, according to Mounsey. The second article by Nancy Keranen (BUAP) summarizes four rhetorical modes which she feels are essential in teaching writing, giving a rationale for teaching academic writing via these modes. I am sure you will find her Annotated Bibliography helpful and informative. Our last essay, written by Toshie Takagaki of Onomichi College in Japan, is one every second language teacher should read. As he shares his literacy autobiography, he brings to the fore the complex issues involved in becoming bi-literate.

In keeping with the theme of L2 writing, the book review for this special issue highlights one of the profession's best new books on ESL composition, Ferris and Hedgcock's **Teaching ESL Composition**.

I hope you'll find these articles in MEXTESOL's special issue helpful and informative.

Nancy Hayward,
Editor, Special Issue