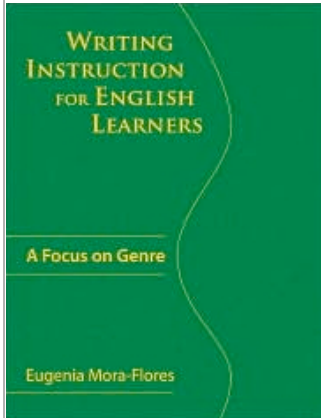


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Writing Instruction for English Learners: A Focus on Genre		
Author:	Eugenia Mora-Flores (2009)	
Publisher:	Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press	
Pages	ISBN	Price
Pp. x + 152	978-1-4129-5729-9 (paper)	\$28.95 U.S.



As a freshman composition teacher and director of a TESL certification program, I encounter writing-phobic students on a daily basis. While my freshmen fear putting pen to paper, my pre-service teachers fear the teaching of writing. Unfortunately, I have yet to find a tool that alleviates freshman writing anxieties. However, Eugenia Mora-Flores' *Writing Instruction for English Language Learners: A Focus on Genre* provides future teachers with a theoretically-driven and highly-structured guide that will calm their worries about teaching writing. The text, which is intended for those who will work with English language learners (ELLs) in grades 2-8, focuses on pedagogical approaches to narrative, expository, and persuasive writing, in addition to poetry.

Mora-Flores starts by discussing the fundamental aspects of second language acquisition (SLA) necessary for understanding the text's five chapters. Concepts such as common underlying proficiency (CUP), basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), and the affective filter are discussed in a clear and concise manner which newcomers to applied linguistics can easily comprehend. Even though her introduction is accessible, she does not gloss over controversies and complexities. For example: When presenting the five stages of second language (L2) development presented, she makes future teachers aware that learners rarely move cleanly from one stage to another.

Future teachers also benefit from the text's thorough review of the five basic steps of writing an essay, which are easily forgotten by advanced writers who have

automatized such processes. Specifically, in Chapter 1, “Writing Instruction for English Learners,” Mora-Flores discusses the motivation behind prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing and gives readers concrete suggestions on how to implement them. Just as in her discussion of SLA, she makes pre-service teachers aware that second language writers do not always complete all the steps in order, but rather frequently skip some and repeat others. In addition, she stresses the importance of letting students talk before, during, and after drafting, yet claims that how much time to allow for student talk will depend on teachers’ knowledge of their students rather than any prescribed formula.

Not only does Mora-Flores paint an honest picture of the writing process, she also gives future teachers step-by-step lessons on each of the five genres covered in the text. Such lessons involve everything from pre-writing strategies to revision strategies and show teachers that grammar, interviewing skills, and the nature of evidence need not be taught in isolation, but instead can be integrated into writing instruction. For example, in Chapter 2, “Narrative Writing”, Mora-Flores discusses how teachers can focus on personal pronouns when writing personal narratives. In Chapter 3, “Expository Writing”, she shows how interviewing techniques and biographical writing can be taught simultaneously. In Chapter 4, “Persuasive Writing,” she illustrates how teachers can help students support their essays by using facts, statistics, quotes, and examples.

An added benefit of these lessons is that many of them are neatly summarized in tables. In Chapter 4, for instance, Mora-Flores provides a table that lists the various kinds of evidence, along with explanations and examples of each. Likewise, she provides excellent “Resource” sheets which are ready to be used and can be photocopied by schools that have purchased the text. These handouts include peer editing sheets, graphic organizers for various genres, idea maps, and transition words/phrases guides.

In addition to supplying handouts at the end of the text, she supplies samples of student writing at the beginning of each chapter. For example: In Chapter 2, “Narrative Writing”, she presents a rough draft of a personal narrative and a final draft of a fairy tale. Doing this allows teachers and teacher educators the opportunity to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of student writing in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and style. Likewise, in Chapter 3, “Expository Writing,” she shows samples of student writing at the speech emergent phase and explains the elements that characterize this period of L2 development.

Many chapters also contain lists of resources teachers can use to teach these various genres. These resources range from teacher guides to fiction and non-fiction works for various grade levels. Such texts are invaluable for beginning teachers who often times feel they lack reference materials to help them build courses.

Perhaps the most positive feature of the text is Chapter 5, “Poetry.” In my experience, ESL teachers shy away from poetry, saying “I’m not a literature person,” or “I don’t

know how to write poetry.” As a result of this anxiety and the lack of accessible materials, I rarely cover it my teacher education courses. However, poetry and creative writing, in general, have been shown to inspire ESL students to become avid readers and writers (see Miller, 2007 for examples). Fortunately, Mora-Flores’ text shows teachers that writing poetry is not only very doable, but also very fun. She clearly explains the forms and functions of many types of poetry, such as Haiku, Cinquain, Diamante, and Limericks.

While the text is an excellent guide for future teachers of ELLs in grades 2-8, it is not appropriate for high school and university instructors, as the author states in the introduction. Texts for secondary and tertiary institutions need to include facets of writing that this one doesn’t, including contrastive rhetoric, plagiarism, and citations styles. In addition, it doesn’t cover other important issues in second language writing such as basic spelling instruction, writing pedagogy in bilingual classrooms, and difficulties faced by learning-disabled ELLs; therefore, teacher trainers who want to address these topics will need to look elsewhere.

In spite of these few limitations, *Writing Instruction for English Language Learners: A Focus on Genre* is an excellent text that I will utilize in my own teacher education courses. It covers a wide range of topics that are crucial for future ELL teachers to understand, such as narrative and expository writing. In addition, the text provides authentic examples of student writing and concrete teaching strategies that are theoretically-based and practical. Mora-Flores’ work is so laudable that even my wife, a former ESL/bilingual elementary teacher and a harsh critic of most teacher training materials, remarked that she wished this book would have been available when she was a pre-service teacher. It surely would have calmed her fears about teaching writing.

References

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