John Bitchener, Neomy Storch, and Rosemary Wette (eds): TEACHING WRITING FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES TO MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS: INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES. Routledge, 2017

Academic writing instruction may be viewed as a balance between teaching and tutoring. In the former, concepts are introduced and in the latter, feedback and guidance are offered. The increasing numbers of multilingual students at English-speaking universities has complicated matters for writing instructors, and a growing body of scholarship related to second language (L2) academic writing is available which may help them adapt their instructional methodology. Despite the sizeable body of research into English for academic purposes (EAP)-related writing, much of it remains manifest in journal papers and, according to the editors of the work here under review, has yet to migrate into edited collections. Teaching Writing for Academic Purposes to Multilingual Students (hereafter Teaching Writing) is editors’ John Bitchener, Neomy Storch, and Rosemary Wette’s response to this deficit. The volume features 13 chapters by 12 eminent L2 writing researchers and practitioners, who address aspects of instructional approach to academic writing instruction. Collectively, the chapters focus very much on tertiary-level academic writing and assume a reasonably high level of English proficiency on the part of learners. Although corrective feedback practices are aptly covered, the book generally focuses on teaching rather than tutoring. Due to the volume’s combination of practical pedagogical advice and L2 writing theory, it should appeal to practitioners, researchers, graduate students, and administrators.

Rather than prescribing any specific plan or set of topics for practitioners to adhere to, the book offers a range of considerations that will assist experienced writing teachers in the design and implementation of their courses. Although all of the chapters treat, to varying extents, issues associated with teaching students whose first language is not English, readers will find plenty of material that is applicable to mixed and even to native English-speaking classes. Many of the book’s contributors have British or Australasian backgrounds, so North American readers can expect some British terminology and may benefit by brushing up on their functional linguistics before reading.

As a tertiary-level writing instructor in South Korea, I appreciate the work both Hyland (Chapter 3) and Bitchener (Chapter 6) have done to explore the gap that often exists between L2 students’ conceptions and performance on the one hand, and institutional standards and expectations regarding academic writing on the other. In his description of Hong Kong’s recent university-wide overhaul of English instruction, Hyland lists traits that are more pronounced in English academic writing than that of other languages (e.g. caution in making claims and more extensive use of citations). Comprehending the
The importance of these characteristics is vital to learners and can be used as a central organizing feature for curriculum designers whose classes will include multilingual students. Bitchener continues to probe the disparity between learner performance and academic writing convention in the area of argument formation. In Chapter 6, he enumerates some of the challenges faced in particular by L2 writers (e.g. comprehension problems with reading academic texts, understanding the nature of critical assessment). Although Bitchener’s multi-stage scaffolded approach to teaching argument creation is intended for the dissertation and thesis, there is no reason that readers could not adapt it for use in other contexts. Chapters 3 and 6 should help practitioners both in the planning stages of their course design and also in diagnosing the misunderstandings that may have led to structural and semantic problems in the texts of their students.

Wette (Chapter 7) rightly approaches learning to use sources as a long-term endeavor, and her chapter highlights research in this area to map evaluating source quality, working with quotations, unintentional plagiarism, and some of the other areas in which L2 writers struggle. Academic writing instructors will doubtlessly appreciate her chapter’s identification of target goals for ongoing instruction and suggested tasks and activities intended to hone learner skills in this complex yet crucial aspect of academic writing.

Choosing the most effective collaborative writing tasks to foster L2 writing development can be daunting. Storch (Chapter 9) offers readers some relevant factors to consider while designing group work and collaborative assignments. These tasks can easily fail to achieve their pedagogical goals. For the sake of expediency, groups of students assigned writing tasks that were intended to be collaborative, often apportion tasks among themselves and work in isolation. Storch warns of such pitfalls, and her chapter can be used as a guide to circumventing them. Also provided is advice about balancing language-focused vs. meaning-focused tasks and effective group selection.

Teaching writing offers more to teacher practitioners than can mentioned in this short review. I would be remiss, however, if I neglected to mention Icy Lee’s contribution on corrective feedback (Chapter 11) which assumes a disparity between student expectations and the amount of feedback that instructors are able to provide. Her comparison of targeted to comprehensive written corrective feedback may help instructors approach the seemingly overwhelming task of providing written corrective feedback in the most effective way possible, according to student background and textual characteristics.

Bearing in mind the overlap between what will interest practitioners and what might be more of interest to researchers, the following section will focus on the latter. Although Paltridge (Chapter 2) closes his chapter with descriptions of actual writing courses offered at his university, his central argument is that context is crucial to variances in academic writing among the disciplines. Scholars and graduate students might like to use the chapter’s rich sourcing to assist in their EAP and academic literacies research. They might likewise appreciate Tardy’s (Chapter 5) well-sourced discussion about the inclusion of
genre approaches in the academic writing classroom. Because the success of such approaches depends so much on the skill with which they are implemented, the chapter should be of particular interest to anyone involved in designing foreign language writing programs.

Researchers interested in how to introduce academic concepts to students, and how to develop and use them as building blocks may be interested in Hammond’s (Chapter 8) discussion of literate talk. Literate talk, as described by Hammond, is dialogic in nature and provides a means by which teachers and learners can discuss concepts, presumably in ways that improve metacognition. The thick shroud of theory provided may perhaps obscure just how vital and fundamental this kind of talk is to teaching and learning. That many Australian school teachers have conceded an inability to engage in such talk when they teach academic writing may be of interest to researchers and administrators alike, as this pedagogical deficit may well extend beyond Australian shores. Readers unfamiliar with the construct of literate talk may wish that a more explicit definition had been provided in the chapter along with some concrete examples.

I would like to have seen somewhere in Teaching Writing a frank discussion of the current state of academic writing. Pinker (2014) and others have reminded us that all academic writing is not created equal. Perhaps L2 writers, at least at the graduate level, are sophisticated enough to be appraised about the ‘publish or perish’ paradigm along with other factors that contribute to the variable quality of extant published material. The reason that this issue is so important is that L2 writing students emulate published texts as part of their learning process. An obvious problem arises when poor lexical usage and confusing syntactic structures are emulated by students in an effort to sound more ‘academic’.

One way that teachers might help their students to avoid using inferior academic texts as models would be to provide them with opportunities to evaluate samples of published writing from diverse disciplines. A simple task would be to discuss with students whether they understand a given text. If the answer is no, then students might consider whether the problem lies in the way that the text was written. In another activity teachers might provide a list of problems common to academic writing paired with sample texts. Students would subsequently identify specific problems and then craft appropriate solutions. This type of critique is an essential feature of, for example, architectural design classes. Students consider the structural and aesthetic strengths and shortcomings of existing buildings in an effort to propagate that which works, and avoid that which does not.

Readers are unlikely to find much in the way of faulty argument or unclear prose in the book under review. After finishing the book, both researchers and practitioners alike are likely to return to the book’s index and extensive references to revisit some of the many topics covered by this work. As mentioned in the introduction, Teaching Writing’s focus is on teaching rather than tutoring. Readers wishing to supplement this book with a more tutor and student

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Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini (ed.): REFLECTIONS ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION. Springer, 2017

Research in applied linguistics has been dominated by positivistic and quantitative approaches at the cost of marginalizing, ignoring, or even delegitimizing qualitative inquiry. As Benson et al. (2009) show, qualitative studies published in the 10 famous journals in the field of applied linguistics amount to 22 per cent of all published articles between 1997 and 2006. Richards (2009) also concludes that of the research papers published between 2000 and 2007 in 15 major journals related to language teaching, only 10–25 per cent were qualitative in their methodology. The dominance of quantitative research is also well observed in the dozens of books published on research methods in language studies focusing just on quantitative approach (Hatch and Lazaraton 1991; Phakiti 2014; Plonsky 2015) and the comparatively few published works delving into qualitative research in applied linguistics and language education (Heigham and Croker 2009; Zacharias 2012). Aimed at voicing ‘the need for the further recognition and visibility of qualitative inquiry in the field’ and inviting ‘the research community to revisit trends and traditions in studies on language and literacy teaching and learning’ (p. 4), this volume is one of the few works that have detailed on the theoretical and practical sides of qualitative research in language and literacy education studies.

In his introduction, Mirhosseini highlights the systematic ignorance of the field of qualitative research paradigm while emphasizing that taking the quantitative path would not provide researchers with trustable answers to many research questions. The editor also argues that the knowledge of the field about various concepts has not improved during the past couple of decades particularly because of the blind insistence of the majority of researchers to follow the quantitative research methods. After this introductory chapter, the book is