Lang. Teach. (2013), **46.3**, 382–393 © Cambridge University Press 2013
doi:10.1017/S0261444813000116

Thinking Allowed

Integrating process and genre into the second language writing classroom: Research into practice

Juval V. Racelis Arizona State University, USA
juval.racelis@asu.edu

Paul Kei Matsuda Arizona State University, USA
paul.matsuda@asu.edu

The field of second language (L2) writing has moved beyond the false dichotomies between process- and genre-based pedagogies perpetuated in the 1980s and 1990s, but there has still been little research on how the two are actually reconciled in the classroom. Consequently, L2 writing instructors are left with an incomplete picture, unsure how to incorporate such research into their own classrooms. This paper describes how one teacher, Juval, encountered the research on process- and genre-based pedagogies and negotiated his understanding of this research into his practice. Alongside Juval's voice is the voice of a teacher educator, Paul, setting these frameworks in the context of larger developments in the field of L2 writing. Their discussion takes Juval from his initial view of writing as a grammar-elicitation task to his resort to research for answers to the complex needs of his students. With further support from colleagues, Juval reaches a place where the two pedagogies are not only reconciled but work together to prepare his students for their writing tasks. His narrative chimes with the experience of many L2 writing teachers and should inspire novice and experienced teachers to reflect on their relationship with theory and research.

Introduction

There are perpetual discussions on the seemingly irreconcilable divide between theory and pedagogy. Many practitioners in the field of language teaching have felt – and will probably continue to feel – that much theory remains too obtuse and inaccessible to be immediately applicable in their classrooms. For other practitioners, the day-to-day realities of the classroom are enough of a juggle, without adding the task of keeping up with current research trends. Our goal in the following is not to seek ways to mend this divide; indeed, the critical stance many practitioners have towards theory may never truly improve. Rather, we hope to provide an alternative approach to this strand in *Language Teaching* by juxtaposing the voice of a teacher, Juval, who likes to think that he is actively informing his teaching practices with theory, and that of a teacher educator, Paul, who is always looking for ways to make theory and research accessible and meaningful to teachers. In addition, we hope to provide a glimpse into how a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444813000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

teacher actually incorporates research into practice by looking at a teacher's development as he first encounters research on two pedagogical frameworks in second language (L2) writing: process- and genre-based pedagogies. We look specifically at how research in these areas has influenced a teacher's decision-making and task creation processes in the real classroom context.

Juval has been teaching writing since 2008 and is currently teaching this and other language courses in a university intensive English program. Paul has been teaching courses on L2 writing pedagogy as well as L2 writing research, witnessing many students going through similar paths of development at different levels. One of the persistent issues is that, while the field of L2 writing has developed as a result of years of conversations about various topics, there are always new teachers coming into the field. Although it is important for these teachers to be exposed to the latest insights from the field, such insights may not make much sense unless the teachers also have a sense of how these conversations evolved. For example, some writing teachers are now talking about 'post-process' while others are only beginning to 'discover' the notion of process (Casanave 2003; Matsuda 2003a).

By structuring this conversation according to the historical development of different approaches to teaching writing, we are not suggesting that the development of L2 writing research is a linear progression as one theory replaces another – the view that Silva (1990) described as the 'merry-go-round of approaches' that 'generate more heat than light' (p. 18). Instead, all insights that have been generated – whether the focus is on sentence-level issues, on the process of writing, or on genre knowledge development – continue to inform the teaching of writing as teachers at various stages of professional development encounter and integrate research-informed insights into their own practice.

The beginning: Cold prompts with high expectations

Juval: Before discussing my interactions with L2 writing research, I feel it is worthwhile to briefly describe where I began as a teacher, as it was my first experiences that shaped my writing pedagogy and my subsequent interpretations of the research. Prior to teaching writing specifically, I taught a grammar class in an Intensive English Program (IEP). I was a beginning master's student relying mainly on the help of my colleagues, curriculum advisors, and intuition. The stated purpose of this grammar class was to increase writers' accuracy and complexity; within this context, writing was a way of eliciting grammar. Focusing mostly on experiential writing, my grammar-writing prompts looked like this:

> *What has been the happiest moment in your life? What happened? Describe and explain.*

This writing prompt appeared on the top of a page, followed by blank lines. It was presented with little additional instruction or discussion. Students were expected to provide a rich description using the present perfect, past perfect, and simple past tenses. With hindsight, I can see that this task was limited (although I can also hear my fellow grammar teachers at the time countering that the context of a grammar course differs from that of a writing course, so prompts would inevitably vary).

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As a novice teacher and beginning master's student, I had not yet read much in the L2 writing literature. My M.A. coursework so far had focused on methodological issues regarding teacher and student roles, notions of tasks and sequencing, and the epistemologies of language. More important, however, is the fact that when, soon after this grammar class, I moved to teaching a writing class, it was this schema that I brought with me: cold prompts with high expectations. 'Cold', because the prompts do not prepare students for (or warm them up to) the task by providing either content or formal schemata. Similarly, expectations that students will produce grammatical structures are quite high, despite a limited amount of feedback over a short period of time.

Traditional approaches

Paul: Although writing has been part of language teaching at least since the 1960s (Matsuda 2001), it has not been fully integrated into teacher preparation programs and language programs, and some of the assumptions from the early years seem to persist in the minds of novice teachers – as Juval's early experience has shown – and even in those of experienced teachers who have not been specifically trained in the teaching of writing.

One of the early assumptions is the notion that writing is the last and most difficult language skill – something students will take up after having acquired the language through oral communication and reading. For various historical reasons, the assumption of the primacy of oral skills and receptive skills has continued to be influential, even after the advent of ideas such as the notional-functional syllabus, communicative language teaching, and the spiral curriculum – ideas that emphasize situational and functional orientation as well as the interaction among various language skills (Matsuda 2001).

Another assumption was the view of writing as the 'handmaid of other skills' (Rivers 1968: 241). In the 1960s, writing was often used as a way of reinforcing sentence patterns that were learned through pattern practice. Students were not allowed to make errors for fear that they would internalize them (Pincas 1962). For this reason, teachers practiced controlled exercises in producing grammatical sentences, and any and all errors had to be corrected immediately by the teacher to avoid the acquisition of incorrect forms and fossilization.

To reduce the chance of students making errors in language production, writing activities were often limited to controlled composition exercises (i.e. the reproduction of prescribed sentence structures and the use of limited vocabulary) or guided composition (i.e. the completion of sentences or paragraphs that had already been started by the teacher). Research-based attempts to encourage students to develop fluency (e.g. Erazmus 1960; Brière 1966) were harshly criticized as 'naive traditional views' by those who – despite the lack of empirical basis – espoused the oral approach (Pincas 1962: 185). What teachers discovered, however, was that these exercises in producing grammatical sentences – the kind of exercises Juval initially used when teaching writing – did not prepare students for the production of extended written discourse (Matsuda 2003b).

During these early periods, writing was seen as an exercise for the sake of language learning rather than an act of communication to accomplish real-world purposes. Teachers therefore elicited student writing by using simple prompts (still commonly used in standardized tests

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of writing) that do not invoke realistic contexts of writing, including its audience, purpose, genres, knowledge or even the writer's position in the community of literate individuals.

Discovering process

Juval: In the second year of my master's I began teaching a reading and writing class. My coursework had not yet exposed me to research specifically in the L2 writing field, nor had I sought it out myself, because I considered myself to be a grammar teacher. I was first introduced to process-based pedagogies not through my reading of the research literature, but through the curriculum meetings at the IEP where I taught in Fall 2009. During those meetings, 'process' seemed to be understood simply as a requirement for multiple drafts.

During the same year, I took my program's introductory reading and writing course as well as a seminar in L2 writing. In the reading and writing course, I was introduced to Ferris & Hedgecock (2005), which sets out the general discussions in the field as they pertain to the classroom. In the L2 writing seminar, which focused on a wide range of topics across the L2 writing field, I first started engaging in the literature on process pedagogies. To be clear, my engagement with the research was a complex process informed not only by the data in these studies, but also by subsequent conversations with colleagues and the ongoing assessment of my students' needs. It was through this dynamic process that I learned to make sense of the research literature.

In the seminar we began by reading Flower & Hayes (1981), which problematized the static stage model process of writing by highlighting the sub-processes that occur. I also read Susser (1994), who investigated the role of teacher intervention in promoting students' writing development beyond mere error correction. Indeed, my intuitions about the writing process had been quite static; aside from some cursory pre-writing tasks, writing – for my students – often involved draft submission and subsequent rewrites that resulted more in error correction than true writing development. My reaction to this literature was to explore these sub-processes by slowing down my students' writing process. For example, findings from Ellis & Yuan's (2004) investigation on pre-task versus on-line planning suggested to me that the pre-writing stages should not be ignored. To facilitate this stage, I allotted more time for discussion and brainstorming in and out of class.

In the research literature I read on process-based pedagogies, a recurring theme was the increased emphasis on valuing students' personal growth through the various stages of the writing process. This was most apparent when reading Elbow's (1999) paper promoting writer self-discovery. I saw room for incorporating these notions through guided reflection writing, in which my students evaluated their goals while also setting new ones. This notion of goal-setting was echoed by Flower & Hayes (1981), in their discussion of how writers regularly set and evaluated current and future goals within their writing tasks.

However, whatever the virtues of this multi-staged process, I quickly discovered that constraints on time and other curricular demands limited the extent to which I could implement these ideas in every assignment. I usually only had time to do this with the first major writing assignment, hoping that the emphasis on writing as a multi-staged process with continuous planning would transfer to the students' future writing assignments and

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also result in more thoughtful writing overall. However, I cannot be sure if my students actually engaged in their own self-reflection and goal-setting for each writing task beyond the classroom activities that asked them to do so. In fact, research suggests that they are not likely to spend the extra time provided for this purpose (Kroll 1990).

The process 'revolution'

Paul: Juval's 'discovery' of the notion of writing process and the gradual shift from a staged view of process (pre-writing, writing, and re-writing) to a recursive and dynamic one mirrors the general development of the notion of process in the field.

The initial articulation of process, based largely on introspection (e.g. Murray 1972), tended to be seen as a straight line – from planning, to drafting, to revising, to editing. With the rise of writing process research, the understanding of the writing process became more sophisticated, developing the view of process as recursive and individualized. Some writing researchers have even argued that writing processes are so individualized and situation-specific that it is not possible to generalize THE writing process (Kent 1999). The task of teachers, then, is not to prescribe a generalized writing process but to help students develop their own writing processes for various writing situations by providing strategies for developing, organizing, and expressing ideas and by creating opportunities for writing. Writing process research and pedagogies were introduced to L2 teaching in the late 1970s and the early 1980s and became influential among L2 writing teachers (Krapels 1990).

As the notion of writing process became popular, several strands of research and pedagogy were identified and developed. One of these focused on personal growth and the expression of individuality through the writing process (e.g. Elbow 1999). Another, based on cognitive research (e.g. Flower & Hayes 1981), focused on writing as a series of problem-solving activities. Yet another pedagogy emphasized the social nature of the writing process as well as the integration of social critique as a mode of knowledge creation through writing (Berlin 1988). These perspectives were often seen as competing (e.g. Faigley 1986) rather than complementary.

In Juval's case, however, he did not uncritically accept the prevailing view that different orientations to process were at odds with each other, perhaps because he was not part of the discursive conflict in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. His critical distance from this heated debate allowed him to integrate these insights into his own process writing pedagogy.

Discovering genre

Juval: In the seminar on L2 writing that forced me to reevaluate and subsequently broaden my conceptualization of process-based pedagogies, I also learned about genre-based pedagogies, a theoretical and pedagogical framework that was completely new to me. In the seminar, we read Hyon (1996) and Hyland (2007), which gave me a disciplinary perspective on genre theory. However, as I read through those works, and later Swales' (1990) seminal book, I felt that their focus on descriptions of genre practices did not easily translate into

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my IEP classroom context. I liked the framework that Swales provided, but the fact that it was for an ESP/EAP context in which students were more advanced, I wondered if I would be able to use the same concepts in a classroom of students with far less academic and writing experience, not to mention lower English proficiency. Browsing through the literature on genre-based pedagogies, I found few studies that actually explored how lower-proficiency students interacted with genres in their writing development; fewer still explored what teachers did with genres and how it affected their students' writing.

Around this time, I was teaching a high intermediate reading and writing class whose aims were to help students develop their reading comprehension and writing skills. I took a second look at my students' writing, reexamining some of the recurrent problems – problems that were not always getting ironed out through the process approach. In many cases, my students' writing 'style' seemed inconsistent. I encountered essays that were often too narrative-like, despite writing prompts that directed otherwise. I also saw many anecdotal introductions, which seemed inappropriate for short response writings. Turning to classroom materials, I realized that the readings in the textbook, which was a reading (not a writing) textbook, represented a wide array of genres – from journalistic feature pieces with attention-grabbing introductions to textbook excerpts and personal narratives – but they rarely represented the kinds of writing that we expected our students to produce. I began to wonder how their reading texts were affecting their writing. I discovered that my colleagues shared similar concerns.

To understand the relationship between reading and writing better, I went back to the research literature. I found Johns' (1997, 2002, 2008) work especially insightful because it was one of the few that addressed novice writers' needs. I also appreciated the way she empowered her students by engaging them as ethnographers of the texts they encounter (2008). As I read through these works, I began to interpret the inconsistencies I found in my students' writing differently. I began moving beyond discrete, local-level features that I had concentrated on when grammar was the focus of my instruction. Instead, I started trying to understand discourse-level issues in writing and how these could translate into the classroom.

As in my first encounters with genre research, I felt there were limitations to its application in my own context. For example, Johns (2002, 2008) addresses raising novice writers' generic knowledge by building connections between these writers and their current coursework. For my students, however, these English language courses are often their only coursework. A similar case could be made for so-called EFL contexts in which writing instruction often occurs in preparation for future unknown contexts, and other courses are taught in local languages.

This problem may become clearer in the light of my struggles with one of the central concepts of genre theory: that of discourse communities (Swales 1990). I tried to make the concept accessible to my lower-proficiency students by using the notion of 'audience' – a concept they were already familiar with in relation to reading skills. However, I quickly learned that the notion of audience was difficult to address in their reading, and transferring this understanding to their writing was even more difficult.

As mentioned earlier, my goal (and the stated goal of the institutions for whom I have worked) was to prepare students for college-level writing and the genres they may encounter. When considering these classroom genres, I struggled with the notion of audience, primarily because, in most cases, students saw the teacher as the audience for these writing tasks. Johns (2011) validates this interpretation of the teacher-as-audience and goes further by engaging

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students in exploring the expectations of the teacher with regard to the purpose of their writing task. While I believe this to be effective, my students often have difficulty imagining audiences other than the sequence of ESL/EFL writing teachers they have had. As a result, their conceptualization of 'audience' remains somewhat monolithic and static.

The process–genre debate

Paul: While rhetoric and composition researchers were considering the competing theories of process in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, L2 writing researchers were engaged in another kind of debate: that between process and genre. Being somewhat conversant with the literature on L2 writing, Juval was already attuned to this development. He was even aware of the tension between process- and genre-based pedagogies but was able to maintain a balance between them. For others, it has not been so easy; many teachers and researchers seem to have been drawn to one side of the debate or the other, depending on their prior experience and training.

The debate, however, was based largely on misunderstandings and exaggerated claims, construing process and genre as mutually exclusive rather than different aspects of writing – two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, some proponents of the process approach were skeptical of genre pedagogy, arguing that it would not be possible for English teachers to teach appropriate genres for all students (Spack 1988). On the other, some genre proponents positioned themselves against process, which they saw as the rejection of anything and everything related to textual features (Horowitz 1986).

One obstacle to integrating process and genre may have to do with the false association of the traditional, product-oriented teaching of writing with genre, which does focus on the text – the product of the writing process. It is important to understand that contemporary approaches to genre are not necessarily the same as the prescriptive approach of the past (although genre can be – and has certainly been – taught in simplistic and reductive ways). Rather, contemporary genre studies approach textual features and functions as dynamic and multifaceted, rather than unidimensional and formulaic (Tardy 2009).

While some researchers positioned themselves in ways that were diametrically opposed to each other, the classroom teachers often adopted process pedagogies (which provided students with tools to develop texts) and genre pedagogies (which provided students with textual materials to work with) as mutually complementary, rather than competing (Raimes 1991). Indeed, Juval was able to see process and genre as complementary, each contributing to different aspects of his teaching.

One of the limitations of genre-based approaches is that teachers do not always have access to all the genres students will encounter, a range that is in any case impossible to predict. A way around this is to help students become genre analysts themselves, engaging in the analysis not only of the rhetorical context (Spack 1988) but also of the textual resources in the particular domain of discourse use (Johns 1997). In this way, process and genre are integrated by turning genre analysis into one of the strategies for learning and writing in the writing process.

In Juval's case, he intuitively figured out the pedagogical solution as it was being worked out in the professional literature. But this innovation did not happen in complete isolation

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from the research literature. By this time, he had familiarized himself with the knowledge base of the field and was thinking along with others who had been struggling with the same set of issues. In other words, he was joining the conversation as a member of the community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991).

Research into the classroom

Juval: Despite acknowledgement in the current literature that process and genre should no longer be seen in opposition, there has not yet been enough research on how these two pedagogical frameworks can be, or have been, reconciled in the classroom. I am continuing to struggle as I try to build a personal pedagogy influenced by research from both frameworks.

To actively bring genre to the classroom I began by building a repertoire that would introduce my students to the kinds of writing they would do in the future. I began with essays and summaries – two types of writing students were already familiar with. I then added short written responses to readings as the third type of writing task, following Hale et al. (1996). Although the limited class time did not allow me to include other task types, my goal was not to expose students to all possible genres. Rather, I sought to create an opportunity to discuss the generic features of these writing tasks in a way that would foster transfer to their future writing tasks – an application of Johns' (1997) notion of student-as-ethnographer.

To bring process and genre together, I started framing our planning, brainstorming, and discussions of the different writing tasks within a context of genre. Pre-planning stages involved understanding the writing task, including its audience and purpose. In addition, before any writing began, students analyzed various types of writing samples that had a similar purpose, as well as alternative writing samples on a similar topic, but which achieved their purpose by employing different generic features. This helped raise students' awareness of how changes in such features were a product of differing requirements (Miller 1984). Thus, the planning stage of the writing process was no longer simply about generating ideas in a vacuum; rather, students developed ideas in response to the rhetorical context that shaped the use of genre features.

In the culminating writing activity of each term, I now require students to write a reflective piece in which they explore the changes in their writing processes and products. For intermediate courses or shorter-term sessions, this takes the form of a short piece in which they evaluate their own growth over the term. I introduce the reflection writing task as a fourth classroom genre – along with summary, short writing responses, and essays – in their existing repertoire of academic writing genres. For more advanced classes, I integrate this task into writers' portfolios where students collect, select, and reflect on the tasks they have completed. I spend whatever time I have left showing how the purpose of reflective writing corresponded with specific textual features.

Post-process

Paul: In recent years, there has been some discussion of the notion of 'post-process' in L2 writing instruction. Although this idea is defined and interpreted in a range of ways, one of the

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key insights seems to be that process is not the panacea; no single theoretical perspective can provide all the answers (Casanave 2003; Matsuda 2003a). There is a perception that genre-based pedagogy and process-based pedagogy are competing against each other. As Juval's example shows, however, they are not competing but complementary ideas – genre looks at one aspect of writing (textual features and functions) while process focuses on another (the process of applying those features in developing the text). Although post-process is sometimes understood to mean the end of process, that is not the most productive interpretation; rather, post-process is 'more productively defined as the rejection of the dominance of process at the expense of other aspects of writing and writing instruction' (Matsuda 2003a: 78–79). The task for the teachers, then, is to find ways to integrate insights from various areas of research in ways that respond to the local context of teaching.

Research into each aspect of writing comes with a different set of challenges as teachers try to implement research in the classroom. For genre, the challenge is to bring in the realistic context of writing and choose appropriate genres to teach; this is especially challenging in situations where students do not have access to the real context of writing outside the classroom. (They have access to the texts, but they don't often get to see how or why people interact with one another by using those texts.) For process, the challenge is to find a good balance between the principles and the students' actual writing processes. Although, in theory, process can be explained as a sequence of activities or strategies that writers can use, when and how to use those resources varies from student to student and from task to task. However, writing teachers need to introduce each of these concepts in some sort of order, which may not coincide with the process students are going through at that time. It may be because of the compound problems that teachers encounter in negotiating these multiple challenges that incorporating genre and process into the same classroom seems so difficult.

But fear not! All teachers – including experienced teachers – constantly struggle with these challenges because, just as every writing situation is different, every teaching situation is different. Even experienced teachers have to address these complex issues by making adjustments according to individual student needs at a particular time. Teaching is a challenging job. Knowledge of theory and research does help because it gives teachers a broader repertoire of possible solutions. Yet it takes years of study, practice, and reflection for teachers to be able to find balanced solutions on the spot. Depending on the nature of the challenges, even experienced teachers continue to struggle. For Juval, too, this type of negotiation will likely continue as he encounters new classrooms, new students, and new challenges. This may not be the answer that novice teachers like to hear. It would be nice to be able to say 'Things will get better' but, unfortunately, things will continue to be complicated, as Juval's experience and other stories of writing teacher development attest (Matsuda 2002). Such is the nature of teacher development, which no-one can escape.

But will it stick?

Juval: By approaching different writing tasks through the lens of genre-based pedagogy, my goal has also been to improve my students' writing in both the short- and the long-term. Granted, one may argue that writing summaries, short-answer responses, and essays could be

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taught just as well without worrying too much about their generic features. Such an approach would look at these activities as discrete tasks, with few attempts to make connections between other writing tasks or possible future writing tasks. One of the goals of genre, however, is to raise some awareness of meta-discursive features; equipped with both global and local knowledge of how to analyze texts, students hopefully gain the flexibility to tackle future writing tasks.

That is my goal, at least. It is hard to tell whether my students actually transfer the strategies of genre awareness onto their future writing tasks. As a culminating activity, I regularly ask my students to write and reflect upon the skills they have learned through the course. More often than not, they describe their writing as discrete tasks, assignments that have improved their writing proficiency and fluency with skills that they added to their repertoire. They report benefiting from the feedback and drafts. However, much less frequent are reflections on how our discussions of genre have prepared them for the course tasks, let alone its applicability to future writing tasks.

However anecdotal my observations, such issues are important in light of recent studies on transfer in writing courses (James 2009, 2010), which often point to differences in context and task specificity as elements that hinder positive transfer of skills. I remain hopeful that my students have gained some flexibility in preparation for a wider range of future writing tasks; the reality, however, is uncertain.

Postscript

In this dialogic exploration, we have tried to highlight the complex negotiation that Juval experienced as he developed as a writing teacher and as he tried to integrate theoretical and research insights into his classroom practices. Of course every teaching situation is different, and every teacher's professional development trajectory is unique, but we believe that Juval's case resonates with the experience of many L2 writing teachers (for more stories of L2 writing teacher development, see Blanton & Kroll 2002). We hope this conversation will inspire novice and experienced teachers to reflect on their relationship with theory and research, and to feel that it is not only inevitable but also important to continue to struggle with these complex negotiations. We do not have to struggle by ourselves; in fact, it is important for teachers to share stories and engage in sustained conversations in order to develop useful knowledge that blends research insights and the actual classroom experiences. You are not alone.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444813000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press

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JUVAL V. RACELIS is a doctoral student in applied linguistics at Arizona State University, USA. His research interests include second language writing, second language teacher education, and teacher cognition. He received a Master's in TESOL and currently teaches academic writing to international students.

PAUL KEI MATSUDA is Professor of English and Director of Second Language Writing at Arizona State University, USA, where he works closely with doctoral students in applied linguistics, rhetoric and composition, and TESOL. Co-founding chair of the Symposium on Second Language Writing and editor of the Parlor Press Series on Second Language Writing, Paul has published widely in various edited collections as well as journals such as *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, *English for Specific Purposes*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *TESOL Quarterly*, and *Written Communication*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444813000116 Published online by Cambridge University Press