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Learning to teach writing through tutoring and journal writing

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Structured reflection on practical teaching experiences may help pre-service teachers to integrate their learning and analyze their actions to become more effective learners and teachers. This study reports on 12 pre-service English as a second language (ESL) teachers' individual tutoring of learners of English language writing. The data of the study are the writing journal entries that the pre-service ESL teachers maintained during their tutoring experience. These journals had common elements: all were used by the pre-service teachers to consider what funds of knowledge they bring to their teaching of ESL learners, to evaluate their roles as writers, learners and teachers and to reflect on the educational, social and cultural implications of teaching writing in English to speakers of other languages. This article describes ways in which both native and non-native English speaking pre-service teachers adapted their instruction to meet the particular needs of individual ESL writers and what they learned in the process. It provides insight regarding the value of using tutoring and reflection generally in teacher education and specifically in the preparation of teachers of ESL.

Keywords: *ESL teacher development; Journal writing; Teacher reflection*

Introduction

This study focuses on the development of teachers' views and practices regarding the teaching of second language writing skills in one-on-one tutoring arrangements that lasted from 4 months to over 1 year. In particular, this study explores new teachers' emerging conceptions of teaching second language writing and what it means to be a teacher, learner and writer. The participants were 12 pre-service teachers with little or no experience in teaching writing who reflected regularly in journals upon their experience of tutoring English language learners in writing.

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Teaching English as a second language (ESL) writing

Although most of the pre-service teachers in this study had had some form of teaching experience, only a few had specifically taught ESL writing. Teaching writing to second language learners of English is a daunting task for many teachers and one that has been accorded relatively low priority in the field of ESL teacher education. Traditionally the majority of ESL teacher education programs have placed more emphasis on developing students' oral and reading skills than on their writing skills; writing has often been the last skill to be taught (if at all) after listening, speaking and reading. Since it was not until relatively recently that entire courses in teaching ESL writing have been designed and taught in ESL teacher education programs, few students preparing to become ESL teachers have had the opportunity to develop an adequate understanding of what makes a successful writer (Reid, 1993).

The writing of second language learners of English often presents problems that are different from those found in the writing of native English speaking students. These include culturally conditioned rhetorical patterns that sound 'strange' to the native speaker ear as well as unfamiliar grammatical errors that are simply not found in native speaker writing. Teachers with little or no training regarding how to provide feedback on second language writing often find it difficult to decide whether to start correcting all errors (which often results in crossing out and rewriting entire blocks of sentences) or to leave the errors untouched because there are simply too many of them. Neither alternative, however, is likely to have a long-lasting and genuine impact on students as they learn to improve their writing in English (Shin, 2002b).

What does a successful teacher response to student writing look like? According to Reid (1993) a successful teacher response 'must help students to improve their writing by communicating feedback detailed enough to allow students to act, to commit to change in their writing' (p. 218). Successful teacher feedback results in substantive and authentic improvements in students' perceptions and practice of writing. Reid (1993) stated that as teachers consider how to respond to student writing they are faced with the following questions.

1. Exactly when—and how frequently—during the writing process should I respond?
2. How can I respond to the student's writing so that the student can process the comments and apply the specifics of my response?
3. What form(s) of response (written, oral, individual, group, class, formal, informal) would be most successful for the students?
4. When should my response be global or summative (focusing mainly on the major strengths or weaknesses) or discrete (focusing on single items within the essay)?
5. What are my objectives for this writing task (for example, improvement in topic sentences, organization, details)? What do I want the student to learn? (pp. 218–219)

To answer these questions teachers must examine the specific needs of individual students and consider the student's perceptions of what he/she considers his/her strengths and weaknesses as writers (Ferris, 2003, pp. 121–122). Writing instruction

must be individualized through teacher feedback on student writing because 'mere exposure to standard writing conventions does not improve student use of them' (de la Luz Reyes, 1991, p. 291). Responding to individual student writing, then, is a critical part of one's job as a writing teacher, and it is one that requires a fair amount of practice and reflection. One way of providing pre-service teachers with clinical practice in this area might be to arrange for them to tutor an ESL student in writing while they learn how to teach ESL writing and then reflect on that experience through journal writing.

Tutoring as a form of clinical practice

The potential benefits of tutoring for pre-service teachers in various content areas are well documented in a number of studies (see, for example, Ryan & Robinson, 1990, Fresko, 1999; Hedrick, 1999). Tutoring can lead to an increased sense of accomplishment and self-esteem, better mastery of academic skills, increased ability to apply and integrate knowledge taught in different courses and a broader, more realistic outlook on the process of teaching and learning. Working one-on-one with a student often has the effect of substantially reducing pre-service teachers' fear of confronting a class and enables them to tailor instruction to the specific needs of the student.

For students, advantages of being tutored have also been reported by a number of studies (see, for example, Woodward, 1981; Topping, 1988; Fager, 1996; Cobb, 1998; Hedrick, 1999). These include increased feedback and encouragement through personal attention, obtaining the exact help needed, closer monitoring of progress and better mastery of skills.

Journal writing as a tool for critical reflection

Journal writing is a technique that has been promoted by educators in many fields, including nursing, counseling and management, as a means of facilitating reflective practice and stimulating critical thinking (for a review see Bain *et al.*, 1999). In the field of teacher education reflection is widely acknowledged and promoted as a critical element in the professional development of teachers (Zeichner, 1992; Calderhead & Gates, 1993). Using teaching and learning journals as a tool for self-reflection by pre- and in-service teachers has been well documented in many studies (see, for example, Zeichner, 1987; Rosenthal, 1991; Wilson *et al.*, 1995; Dart *et al.*, 1998; Bain *et al.*, 1999; Baird, 1999).

By emphasizing the importance of providing contexts in which teachers use their educational experiences to construct an understanding of their philosophy of teaching, as well as their strengths, weaknesses and potential as teachers, the reflective approach enables prospective teachers to integrate theory and practice and to plan their personal and professional development. While the reflective approach has been broadly examined in the context of teacher preparation programs and professional development, the effect of tutoring writing and reflecting upon that experience

through the maintenance of journals by pre-service ESL teachers has not been adequately investigated. The current study addresses this important gap.

In writing about reflective practitioners Schön (1983, 1987) made a useful distinction between 'reflection-in-action', which refers to thinking during an event and allows for changes in actions as they occur, and 'reflection-on-action', which refers to thought processes after an event has taken place. Both types of reflection are involved in constructing and reconstructing experience and can be facilitated by maintaining a journal. That process helps pre-service teachers be aware of how learners experience learning, something that Brookfield (1991) believed is crucial for teachers to develop.

Several researchers have maintained that in reflecting on and understanding experiences in teaching, writing plays a central role. For example, Van Manen (1990) wrote:

> Writing fixes our thought on paper. It externalizes what in some sense is internal; it distances us from our immediate lived involvements with the things of our world. As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us … . Reflective writing about the practice of living makes it possible for the person to be engaged in a more reflective praxis. By praxis we mean thoughtful action: action full of thought and thought full of action. (pp. 125–128)

Thus, rather than merely being an exercise of redactive skills, writing enhances one's ability to 'see' by enabling the writer to abstract and objectify his/her understandings from his/her concrete involvements (Ong, 1982).

For the pre-service teachers of this study, tutoring an ESL student in writing and reflecting on that experience through the maintenance of journals were designed as experiences that would provide them with opportunities to critically examine ways in which ESL learners develop writing skills in English. In addition, it was hoped that the tutoring and reflection would help these new teachers to evaluate their various roles as writers, learners and teachers. In this paper I attempt to capture those experiences and explore ways in which the insights obtained can be useful to the professional development of writing teachers, as well as to the general teacher education community.

Method

The current paper examines the journal entries and class discussions of 12 pre-service teachers who were enrolled on a writing methods course that I have been teaching as part of an ESL teacher preparation program for the last 5 years. Students take this three credit course as an elective toward a master's program in Instructional Systems Development with concentration on ESL/Bilingual Education. The program consists of 36 hours on ESL methodologies, cross-cultural communication, second language acquisition, assessment and evaluation and instructional systems design. The pre-service teachers were assessed based on their weekly assignments, journals on tutoring, a final examination and class participation. In addition, each pre-service teacher was required to tutor an English language learner in writing for a semester. The one-on-one tutoring sessions took place once every 2 weeks throughout the semester and

each teacher worked with one assigned student for the entire semester, except in cases where the students did not want to continue meeting with their tutors.[1]

As can be seen in Table 1, the pre-service teachers had diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.[2] Selection of the pre-service teachers, while not designed to be representative, provided a broad student teacher perspective on issues related to teaching ESL writing.

The participants represented a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. Seven were native English speakers. Five were second language speakers of English, with Korean, French and Portuguese as their first language backgrounds. While two teachers had some limited experience teaching writing to high school students and adults, the others basically had no experience in teaching writing.

The students, all of whom were adult English language learners, also had differing language backgrounds and levels of English proficiency.[3] These students were either personal acquaintances of the pre-service teachers or were students enrolled on the Intensive English Program at the same university.

As can be seen in Table 1, the writing the students engaged in covered a wide range of topics and genres, including both personal narratives and academic writing. In their English classes the students were exposed to a range of organizational and grammatical structures appropriate for academic writing through authentic readings and language activities.

Helping pre-service teachers to tutor students in writing

The pre-service teachers in the writing methods course learned about the history of writing instruction and writing theories, writers' workshops and the use of various types of journals. They were also introduced to the role of literature and methods for integrating oral skills into literacy instruction. In addition to these materials, I reviewed sample ESL student essays to illustrate techniques for providing feedback on student writing. These techniques included reviewing student writing for content and organization, determining which grammatical errors to address based on the communicative importance of the errors, conducting mini grammar lessons and training students to self-correct and think critically about their writing. In class the pre-service teachers practiced these techniques with sample essays in groups of three or four, where they collaboratively identified what writing issues to focus on and decided how to best address the problems. They were instructed not to discuss every error (even if this were possible, it would not be desirable from the point of view of the student), but to focus on two or three major issues in their students' writing during each session (see also Shin, 2002a; Ferris, 2003).

Beginning about the fourth week in the semester, each teacher conducted individual tutoring sessions with his/her student once every 2 weeks. These sessions ranged from 30 minutes to 2.5 hours in duration. Shortly after each tutoring session the pre-service teachers were asked to write about the session in their journals. They were asked to report how their student's writing problems were identified and addressed, difficulties or problems they faced and successes they experienced. The teachers were

Table 1. Pre-service teachers and the students they tutored, English writing levels of the students and topics of student essays

| Teacher | | Student | | | |
Name	First language	Name	First language	Level of written English	Essay topics
Tom	English	Song Kyu	Korean	Intermediate	'Computer programming'
		Gary	Thai	Intermediate	Paper on construction technology; research proposal on an international space station
Pattie	English	Steve	Korean	Advanced	'Studying in the US', 'Learning American customs'
Linda	English	Ji Yun	Korean	Advanced	Paper for a graduate course on 'Human learning and cognition' 'Differences in writing academic papers in Korean and in English'
Matt	English	Chang Yun	Korean	Intermediate	TOEFL essay writing section
Eva	English	Alice	Twi	Advanced	'Being a nurse practitioner'
Tammy	English	Hiroko	Japanese	Intermediate	'Living in the US'
Doris	English	Arturo	Spanish	Beginning	TOEFL essay writing section
Susan	Korean	Sung Woo	Korean	Intermediate	'Unforgettable moment', 'Who I most admire', 'A beautiful story' 'Fire: the greatest invention', 'After reading *Necklace*'
Soo Young	Korean	Ji Sook	Korean	Advanced	'Being a music composition major'
		Mina	Thai	Advanced	'Difficulties living in the US as an international student'
Ji Yun	Korean	Louise	French & German	Advanced	Daily journal on topics chosen by tutee
Richard	French	Christine	German	Advanced	A final paper for a film criticism course Controlled writing exercises on developing summary
Ana Maria	Portuguese	So Myung	Korean	Intermediate	'Cross-cultural encounters in the US' 'Family values'

also asked to reflect upon how the session went in general, what they learned from the process and whether they would do anything differently the next time. Whenever applicable the teachers were to relate their experiences to what I had discussed in class and/or to the ideas they had encountered in the assigned readings.

The journals were submitted to me and I then provided written comments to the pre-service teachers regarding their tutoring experiences. Each teacher submitted a total of five to seven journal entries, each ranging from one to four pages in length. Copies of students' essays with the teachers' written comments were attached to these reflective journal entries and submitted to me as well. With the teachers' permission, some of the teacher journal entries were used as a basis for class discussions. These generated some stimulating conversations.

Analytical procedure

According to Van Manen (1990), a 'theme' is a tool for arriving at the meaning of the described experience and a form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand. Generally there are three approaches one can take toward uncovering thematic aspects of an experience in a text:

1. a holistic reading approach, in which the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole is sought and expressed by formulating a phrase;
2. a selective or highlighting approach, through which the researcher highlights statements or phrases that seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described;
3. a detailed or line-by-line approach, in which every sentence in the text is examined to see what it reveals about the experience being described.

As one studies written descriptions of an experience by using any or all of the methods described above, certain experiential themes recur as commonalities or possible commonalities. The task for the researcher, then, is to extract these themes by lifting appropriate phrases or by capturing in singular statements the main thrust of the meaning of the themes. To varying degrees the following analysis relies on these approaches and is organized around common themes that have emerged from both my reading of the teachers' journals and the teachers' reading of their own journal entries.

Analysis of pre-service teachers' reflection on tutoring

The pre-service teachers were asked to comment on their overall tutoring experience in a separate assignment. This was submitted to me as part of their writing portfolio at the end of the semester. This assignment required them to reread all of the tutoring journal entries that they had written and then to highlight major points and lessons that they had learned in a two to three page essay. They were to reflect back on their tutoring experience and discuss ways in which it contributed to their overall development as ESL writing teachers.

My own analysis of the pre-service teachers' tutoring journal entries was then compared with their reflective reading of their journals to arrive at the thematic categories. There was a significant match between what the pre-service teachers chose to highlight and the categories from my own analysis of their reflective journal entries.

Five thematic categories were identified:

1. benefits of tutoring for teachers and students;
2. experimenting with different teaching styles to meet individual student needs;
3. training students to self-correct;
4. what to address, content versus mechanics?;
5. issues surrounding non-native English speaking teachers.

Each was discussed in at least two-thirds (or 8 out of 12) of the pre-service teachers' reflective end of semester essays. The only exception to this rule was allowed in the fifth category (i.e. issues surrounding non-native English speaking teachers). However, it was noteworthy that three of the five non-native English speaking teachers (the Korean teachers) discussed this issue at great length; apparently, it was significant to their development as ESL teachers.

Benefits of tutoring for teachers and students

In general, tutoring and reflecting upon that experience was viewed as beneficial for both the pre-service ESL teachers and their students. The teachers found several advantages to tutoring.

(a) Tutoring writing is a satisfying experience.

> In general, I would say satisfying is a very good word to describe working with Ji Yun. (Linda)

> I felt rewarded and happy with my work as a teacher this semester. (Susan)

(b) Tutoring helps one build confidence as a teacher.

> She's got a quick and eager mind and responds quickly and usually positively to my suggestions, which gives me more confidence as a writing teacher. (Linda)

> This log, and your responses to it, convinced me that I will be a good teacher. (Tom)

(c) Tutoring writing helps one realize that improving writing is a process that may take some time.

> Writing skill cannot be improved in a short period. Actually, it is the hardest part among other language skills. Without patience, teachers would become tired soon, because being a good writer needs more than just language skills. (Susan)

(d) Tutoring writing helps one discover oneself as a writer.

> It encourages me in my own writing process to see Christine apply the things she has learned, and I sure am proud of her accomplishments. (Richard)

(e) Tutoring benefits the student by providing teachers with opportunities to address the specific needs of students.

> After going over her work, it is obvious that Christine has learned a lot from our tutoring—and so did I. Even though Christine found the exercises challenging, she thought the way the various steps were presented was very useful. (Richard)

Experimenting with different teaching styles to meet individual student needs

An analysis of the journals revealed that the teachers experimented quite freely with different teaching styles. Sometimes, they were very direct in giving students instructions on how to revise their drafts. At other times they were more open to student input and negotiation of meaning. While this might be the result of an absence of a clear plan for managing the sessions due, perhaps, to a lack of experience in teaching writing, it may also be an indication of the teachers' ability to continually make adjustments to their teaching based on student reactions—a highly desired attribute in teachers.

Consider the following excerpt in which one teacher engages her student in a conversation about the content of his paper and encourages his input.

> I asked him about the topic and how he felt about the information he included. He said that possibly the information was not about the topic. I read it again and thought that in a way the information in the piece did relate to each other but possibly under a different topic than the chosen one. We talked about this and discussed possible other titles. … He came up with several titles and I gave a few suggestions. (Pattie)

Phrases such as 'I asked him …', 'He said…', 'We talked about this …', 'He came up with …', 'I gave a few suggestions' indicate that Pattie's teaching technique was largely the result of a collaborative effort between her and the student. Rather than merely correcting his mistakes, she focused on encouraging her student to take more ownership of the revising process. Pattie went on to conclude:

> I really enjoyed this tutoring session and the feeling of partnership that I felt with him. It felt like we were working together to achieve a goal instead of me fixing his paper. I was greatly relieved by this. (Pattie)

While Pattie found the strategy of facilitating a discussion to be fairly successful in one session, she took a more direct approach in her next session, when she addressed content issues in her student's writing:

> This time I was more directive in my tutoring style because I was trying to focus on content of ideas in the paper. I already had in mind from our previous work together and our editing practice in class that he might need help with which ideas to keep in the paper and which ones did not fit in. This seems to be a more difficult idea because it is more of an abstract concept and based on our English rhetoric system. I read through the paper once and told him that I thought he had a lot of good ideas but that we needed to take a look at these ideas and see which ones we might want to focus on. I told him that it would be better to focus on one or two than to have as many as five or six. We went through the paper together and I wrote the different ideas the paper contained on the left margin. (Pattie)

Note the differences in her description of the actions from her previous entry. Her expressions (such as 'I read through the paper once and told him …', 'I told him that it would be better …') suggest that she took more control here than she did in the previous session. While she seemed to feel that interactive discussion has its benefits, she apparently also felt that she needed to adopt a more direct teaching style when dealing with an aspect of writing with which her student was unfamiliar.

A similar pattern was found in another teacher–student pair, as reported by Richard in his second journal entry:

> What happened to the paper that Christine had shown me the first time we met? Well, it was cut in pieces and meticulously reorganized, with additional writing between the various parts. YES, she really rolled up her sleeves and did 'go for it'. She seemed so thankful that I had told her 'what to do'. (Richard)

In contrast to this rather heavy-handed style of correcting errors in the second tutoring session, Richard encouraged his student to take more control during their fifth meeting, when he mostly 'listened' to her thoughts about how to develop her ideas further to improve her essay.

> During this tutoring session I somehow felt like that teacher who was wondering whether he was being fair to his students and fair to himself since he was only 'listening'. In effect, all I did this time was to ask Christine what the assignment was about, what she liked about her pieces of writing, what she was not too pleased with, and how she thought she could make some parts 'better'. That's right, it all developed smoothly, and Christine simply (almost naturally) answered my questions and automatically did the necessary changes as we went along. (Richard)

Overall, these teachers seem to have come to recognize that teaching writing is a delicate balancing act in which the writing teacher 'plays several different roles, among them coach, judge, facilitator, evaluator, interested reader, and copy editor' (Reid, 1993, p. 217). Adopting different approaches depending on the stage of the writing process and the particular needs of the students is a required skill for teachers to be effective. These pre-service teachers seem to have learned this skill partly through the close interaction with students that tutoring provides.

Helping students to self-correct

One focus of the writing methods course is on exploring ways in which to progressively move students toward less dependence on the help of teachers by helping them learn to recognize and correct their own errors. The tutoring journals reflect the pre-service teachers' efforts in this direction.

One way in which the teachers helped their students find solutions to their own problems is found in the use of self-editing checklists which were provided in the methods course. Linda's entry shows her assessment of the effects of tailoring such material to the specific needs of her student:

> Next, I pulled out the example of the Self-Editing checklist Sarah [the instructor] had given us in class last time. I asked her to make one for herself, based on the issues we had

discussed so far, i.e. the mechanical problems she has the most difficulties with. She liked this idea and quickly made a list of three items she needs to work on most: 1) word choice, 2) subject-verb agreement, and 3) articles. I asked her if I could suggest two more items to add to her list. I mentioned singular/plural issues and pronoun agreement (with the noun it relates to). She agreed these were also things she needs to pay attention to and added them to her list. I then asked her to use the self-editing checklist to revise an essay she wrote to hand in today for her Human Learning & Cognition class. It was very satisfying to see her revise it on her own based on the check list we had devised! (Linda)

Another teacher reported his satisfaction in seeing how his student skilfully applied self-correction techniques that he had taught her.

Christine and I also went over the third part of her paper (she wants to keep the second—the best, in her opinion—for last). I was pleased to see that she had applied what she had learned for the first part very well. She was now able to pinpoint her 'problems' and she was actually able to 'correct' them as we went along. For this part of the assignment, however, she knows that she must try to work on the conclusion a little more. It was a real pleasure to see her clearly state her thesis, and her conclusion has really good elements, which leads me to think that she will be able to fix it herself really well. (Richard)

Not all learners can correct their own grammatical errors. Sometimes learners may have internalized an incorrect version of a grammar rule or they simply have not learned the rule in question.

Leki (1992, p. 131) stated that teachers who would like to help students correct sentence level errors might begin to get a picture of the students' developing English by doing a number of formative assessment activities with them: (1) asking them to orally explain their reason for constructing a phrase or sentence as they did; (2) giving several correct and incorrect versions of the misused structure and asking the student to indicate which ones are correct and which are not. This latter strategy is exactly what one of the pre-service teachers employed in explaining pronominal reference to her student.

We finished discussing the paper I had written comments on last time on Gestalt psychology. There is one sentence that did not sound quite right to me last time that I had difficulty explaining my concerns about. So I asked her if I could think about it and talk to her about it more next time. It reads: 'The strongest factor of the unitary percept seems to increase our memory using the laws of the Gestalt'. I had told her that I thought what she wanted to say was: 'The strongest factor of the unitary percept seems to be that it increases our memory …'. She could not see the difference in the meaning last week. After giving it some thought before our meeting today, I realized that the way she had written it implies that the 'strongest factor' increases our memory, rather than the 'unitary percept'.

I decided to break the sentence down into parts. First, I wrote the two sentences twice—on two separate pieces of paper. On the second sheet, I re-wrote each sentence under the original one, more simply but with the same meaning. On the first original sentence, I drew an arrow from 'factor' to 'increase', indicating that the verb relates to this noun. On the second sentence, I circled 'it' and drew an arrow to 'unitary percept' to indicate that this is the noun that 'it' refers back to. Then I underlined 'it increases our memory' to show that this whole phrase describes 'the strongest factor'. (Linda)

While Linda had realized that Ji Yun's sentence was problematic, she could not immediately identify the problem. She therefore decided to think about it more until the next session. In the meantime, she consulted grammar texts and thought about ways in which to teach pronominal reference in a mini grammar lesson.

> At our meeting, I first showed her the two versions of the sentences—hers and mine, with nothing else written on the paper. I asked her to read them and see if she could see any difference in their meanings. At first, she said the second sentence is clearer. I asked her again if she could see any difference in the meaning. To my delight, she did! It clicked suddenly, and she drew her own arrow from 'it' to 'unitary percept'. Then we looked at the second sheet I had prepared and she immediately understood what I had done and completely saw the difference in meaning of the two sentences. I still wish I could explain it better, but I'm glad at least I succeeded in helping her understand that they mean different things. (Linda)

Deciding what to address

Initially, almost all of the teachers reported feeling overwhelmed by the number of non-native errors in their students' writing and by not knowing where to begin in providing their feedback. Over time a few teachers found it helpful to focus on a few major issues, and the tutoring journals reflect their decision-making process about what to work on with their students and how much time to spend. Because they received training in the methods course about how to identify two or three significant problems to address in their students' writing per session, these entries are useful as indicators of the pre-service teachers' integration of course knowledge with practice.

One of Eva's entries shows how she came to a decision about what feedback to provide on her student's writing.

> Like you mentioned in class, I've found it's best to choose one thing to focus on and stick to it rather than trying to correct an entire paper. At times I wasn't sure what to focus on, or I felt like I didn't know how to help, or that my efforts wouldn't aid her writing; but looking back, I think I might have helped a bit, even if only by providing moral support. Alice seemed unsure of herself throughout the assignment; however, she appeared to be proud of her final draft. (Eva)

Content versus mechanics

What happens when teachers are unfamiliar with the content of student writing? One strategy for teachers in dealing with unfamiliar content in English for Specific Purposes and in Content-Based Instruction is to let the learner explain the content as a way of using English appropriately and dealing with the teacher's possible lack of content knowledge (Reid, 1993). It is noteworthy that although this strategy of encouraging the learner to discuss content was not reviewed in the methods class, it was used by Eva.

> I asked her two questions: 1) What is the most important idea in this paper? 2) How did you support that idea? What details support that idea? As she spoke, I wrote down what she said and showed it to her. I asked her how the organization of what she told me is different from the organization of the paper. She noticed the differences but didn't seem

to know where to begin in correcting her work. She used words like 'topic sentence', 'main idea', and 'supporting sentences' in her answer. She explained that she has a difficult time organizing all of her ideas into sentences that fit together to make a well-managed paper. We spent the rest of the time talking about how she organized her thoughts for a new writing assignment. During our talk, I offered some insight about my own organization of thoughts and ideas when writing (thesis). We applied those ideas to her new assignment so that she could begin her research and bring a rough copy to review next week. (Eva)

Another strategy used by some teachers when faced with unfamiliar content was concentrating on grammar, spelling and punctuation, as Linda's session with her student demonstrates.

I had expected to focus first on the content of her writing, as I had when I read her assignment for our writing class the week before. Instead, she brought me a paper for her Human Learning and Cognition class, and because I have not yet taken the class and am unfamiliar with the subject matter, I felt unable to comment on the content of the paper. So basically, our discussion of that paper focused on mechanics. (Linda)

In terms of managing the one-on-one sessions, some pre-service teachers felt that it was necessary to spend the entire meeting discussing a single problematic word or phrase. These cases were usually handled by a discussion of the use of the word or phrase and the teacher's suggestions for alternative expressions. For example, one teacher, Doris, decided to focus on the incorrect use of a particular phrase in her student's essay, which was written following a prompt in a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) preparation book:

Some people prefer work or activities that mainly involve working with people. Others choose work or activities that mainly involve working with objects or machines. Compare these types of activities. Which of them do you prefer? Give reasons to support your answer.

In answering the essay prompt Arturo (Doris's student) had written the following in his first paragraph:

Many people like to work with people, to have good communication. Meanwhile, they like to learn about other jobs or cultures in some conversation with them. Usually they like to work with people because they give helping them. On the other hand, earn a lot of money save them the problems. Most people like these jobs because usually they don't have *a hard job* and are busy every time. (Emphasis added)

Doris then responded to Arturo's use of the term 'hard job' in the following way.

Arturo's use of the term 'hard job' meant a job with a lot of physical labor. We talked about the meaning of 'hard job' in English, and we discussed how a non-physical job could be 'hard' or 'difficult'. I suggested that terms such as 'physical job, job with a lot of physical labor', or 'working with one's hands' were used in English to express the idea he had. I suggested the words 'creatively' and 'challenges' might help to express what he was trying to say with strings of awkward English. After we talked about their meaning, he was very happy. So was I. We were making progress despite his tired attitude. (Doris)

As this and the other excerpts in this section show, the pre-service teachers were continually involved in monitoring student progress, making decisions about which issues to selectively address in student papers and searching for and experimenting

with various techniques they believed were useful in helping students improve their writing in English.

Issues surrounding non-native English speaking teachers

In this section I turn to discussing a somewhat broader socio-cultural issue which emerged in the analysis of the journals, namely the problems faced by some non-native English speaking teachers in establishing their authority as teachers of English.

Role of the native speaker in language education

Recently, there has been much scholarly debate over the role of non-native speaking teachers in language teaching (Braine, 1999; Kamhi-Stein, 1999; Kramsch, 1997; Medgyes, 1994). While native speaking teachers are commonly believed to be better language teachers than non-native teachers (due mainly to their native speaker status), a number of scholars maintain that it is inappropriate to treat native-speaker proficiency as the sole standard when considering qualifications for hiring teachers of English as an international language (Cook, 1999; Fukumura, 1993; Phillipson, 1992). Some researchers argue that although it is true that non-native speaker teachers usually suffer from a lack of native speaker proficiency, they should not be excluded from teaching positions because not every learner's goal is to learn English from native speaker teachers in order to speak as native speakers (Fukumura, 1993). For some learners, they argue, the best models may be teachers who share the same linguistic and cultural experiences with their students, can anticipate problems and can share strategies they have used in their own language learning (Phillipson, 1992; Fukumura, 1993; Medgyes, 1994; Kahmi-Stein *et al.*, 1999).

The journal entries of the non-native English speaking teachers of this study highlight some of these advantages.

> Her TOEFL score is 470 which is below average and her speaking and writing is also very poor. Since I know Korean way of speaking English, I could understand what she was trying to communicate but I guess if the teacher were American he/she might have trouble understanding her. (Soo Young)

> In this session, I just put aside all of his grammatical errors like articles, prepositions, and pronouns in order to focus on his almost fossilized style of rhetoric and organization. My student translates Korean into English when he writes in English. This tends to lead readers to misunderstand what he intends to say. (Susan)

Not surprisingly, non-native speaker teachers generally possess a deeper understanding of what it means to write in English as a second language. Many feel a sense of empathy towards fellow non-native writers of English. For example:

> While I am working with Louise who is also a second language learner of English, I have reflected myself as a learner and a candidate of a teacher of English [sic]. The correction of writing is not as important for us as having strong motivation to write in English and to have confidence in writing in a second language. (Ji Yun)

Unlike other teachers, who provided feedback on their students' writing assignments for university courses, Ji Yun experimented with having Louise e-mail her with daily journal entries because she felt that the frequent journal entries would help her student develop fluency in her writing without being overly concerned with grammatical accuracy. Thus, in addition to their weekly face-to-face meetings, she provided e-mail feedback to Louise twice a week. This approach seems to have been largely successful, as suggested by the following.

> I tried to give her much opportunity to express her emotion and daily life experiences through e-mail. She was faithful to e-mail me, and her contents and organization have improved. (Ji Yun)

Issues around non-native speakers as language teachers: the role of culture

The apparent benefits of sharing the same first language background are not always equally perceived by the learners. In keeping with the common belief that native speakers are better language teachers than non-native speakers, some students actively reject non-native English speaking teachers. For example, one Korean speaking teacher in this study met with great resistance from her Korean speaking student from the outset.

> The first question she asked me was why Korean students in our class chose Korean English Language Center (ELC) students. She thought that's not beneficial at all for Korean ELC students. What she was trying to say was she wanted to have a native speaker teacher, not a Korean teacher. She may think that she only can learn from a perfect native speaker, not from a second language speaker like me. She was actually pretty resistant from the first moment when I called her. I told her that she couldn't have another teacher even though she wanted to because our classmates all already chose our students. By that time, she reluctantly took her pencil case out from her backpack. She seemed not ready to accept anything from me. What is worse is that I am 3 years younger than she is. I was so frustrated but wanted to make her realize that she could learn from me. (Soo Young)

What is not being said here is that there is a cultural explanation for the students' resistance. One of the principal Confucian values that have significantly contributed to shaping Korean culture is respect for the elderly. Older persons are viewed as wiser than younger persons because they have experienced more of what life has to offer. In instructional settings teachers, who are typically older than their students, are treated with the utmost respect and their knowledge is rarely questioned. Teachers who are younger than their students, however, are not automatically granted this respect. Instead, they must work hard to earn it.

> Her next question was what I was going to teach. She was wondering if I had previous teaching experience and if I prepared for how to teach. That was very challenging remarks to a teacher I think. She doubted if I could teach all the time. I told her that I had plenty of teaching experience in L1, but not in L2 to be honest, and said that I wanted to be of help to her hopefully during our tutoring periods [sic]. (Soo Young)

Then, after unsuccessfully attempting to persuade her student to brainstorm and free write for a new essay, Soo Young ended their tutoring session.

> Our first session was finally over like this. I was so puzzled at first but tried to smile all the time and not lose my temper. At the end, I wanted to give the idea that I am qualified to

> teach by telling about myself but she didn't even want to listen. So I let her go. (Soo Young)

After their first session Soo Young was unable to meet with her student again and was assigned a Thai speaker to work with for the rest of the semester. Fortunately, she had a better relationship with this student:

> She is from Thailand. She is around my age but I didn't ask her age this time. Her TOEFL score is 545 which is pretty good. She finished her college in Thailand and came here 4 months ago to get a master's degree. The good thing is she is willing to learn something new. At first, I told her I'm not a native speaker but she didn't mind. (Soo Young)

Soo Young seems to have realized that comparing age, a culturally appropriate practice when two or more Koreans meet for the first time, may not be a desirable exercise in every teaching situation involving adult students. However, when she mentions to her new student that she is a non-native speaker of English, she again places herself in a vulnerable position.

Not all non-native speaker teachers experienced difficulty with their students. In fact, another Korean–Korean teacher–student pair, Susan and Sung Woo, worked very well together and both seem to have benefited from the experience:

> At last, I could have a chance to meet my student! I was a little nervous, not knowing what to teach and how to start to teach. It was my first time teaching somebody how to write in English. Besides, the atmosphere between my student and me was somewhat awkward. In order to warm up this odd mood, I started to talk about myself in a friendly way, such as my life both in Korea and in America, hometown, family, major, and teaching experiences in Korea. Fortunately, he was a very attentive listener who seemed to enjoy my stories. Then, I asked him to talk about himself. As a second language learner, he was not good at speaking English; however, he had lots of deep ideas about his cultural experiences in America. Listening to his stories, I came to learn his primary concerns and interests. Our conversation, which made us feel close and comfortable, was successful. (Susan)

For this pair neither age nor gender differences was an issue. Instead, there seems to have been apparent personal compatibility that may have helped to create a more positive relationship between the teacher and the student.

Relationships among native and non-native speaker teachers

One of the main characteristics that distinguished the non-native speaker teachers from the native speaker ones was that the non-native teachers sometimes enlisted the help of native speakers (not necessarily teachers) to review student writing. After their one-on-one sessions with students, some of the non-native English speaking teachers had asked their native English speaking friends to also read and comment on the same piece of writing that they had commented on. This provided these teachers with an additional opportunity to discuss student writing (without the student being present) and to see how a native speaker might approach the task of providing feedback on the same piece of writing. It also provided them with the opportunity to ensure that they conveyed correct information about English grammar and usage to their students, the lack of which is a great source of worry for teachers who are second language learners of English themselves.

> Then I told her that I would have some American friends read her paper and get feedback on it. By doing this, I can cover up my weak point as a non-native speaker. (Soo Young)

> Thinking that my purpose was not to fix his writing, I analyzed his writing in terms of clarity, organization, consistent or grammatical errors, and mechanics. After this, I asked one of my American friends to consider this evaluative work with me. (Susan)

The continuing improvement in English of non-native English speaking teachers while they develop as teachers is a topic that certainly warrants further investigation as English is globally learned and taught by increasingly large numbers of non-native speakers (see Braine, 1999).

Conclusion and implications

My analysis of the teacher journal entries indicates that tutoring an ESL student in writing was a valuable experience for the pre-service teachers in terms of integrating theory and practice, developing personal styles of teaching writing and critically examining various social and cross-cultural issues involved in teaching English writing to speakers of other languages. Most of the pre-service teachers came into the tutoring arrangement with little or no experience in teaching writing but seemed to have developed more confidence and competence in teaching writing partly as a result of this reflective clinical practice. The writing journal entries seemed to help them to critically examine what they know, to evaluate their various roles as writing teachers and to reflect on the socio-cultural and political nature of teaching writing in English to speakers of other languages. There are numerous lessons here for teacher preparation and language learning.

Implications for teacher education

Pairing reflective clinical practice, such as tutoring and journal writing, with a related methods course has many benefits for teacher education. First, journal entries serve to inform the teacher educator of various issues in teaching writing that pre-service teachers face. In a sense, the journal entries help teacher educators to perform an ongoing needs assessment that enables them to determine topics to be discussed in the methods class. For example, following my reading of Linda's entry about her mini grammar lesson on pronominal reference, I thought it would be helpful to review techniques for addressing persistent grammatical problems in the methods class.

Adapting the work of Bates *et al.* (1993), I discussed the importance of distinguishing more serious errors (e.g. incorrect verb tense or word form, incorrect use of a modal auxiliary such as 'can' or 'may') from less serious errors (e.g. incorrect subject–verb agreement, incorrect or missing article, problem with the singular or plural of a noun) and ways in which teachers can assist students to compile user-friendly personal references for their persistent high priority errors. Similarly, upon discovering Eva's strategy of encouraging her student to discuss content that was unfamiliar to her, I identified a gap in the topics covered in the methods class, namely issues related to teaching academic writing. This discovery led me to subsequently cite Eva's

experience in class as a way of introducing the teaching of academic and technical writing. Overall, the journals played an important role in helping me to better understand the successes and difficulties that the pre-service teachers experienced as they developed as writing teachers.

In addition to cultural issues arising from dealing with the content and mechanics of writing, problems caused by different expectations of teachers and students were also addressed in class. For example, Soo Young's problem with her older Korean student, who refused to be tutored by a younger, non-native speaker of English, sparked stimulating discussions on what makes a good writing teacher. Students engaged in a thought-provoking conversation about the non-native status of ESL teachers and the advantages and disadvantages of instruction from native and non-native speaker teachers. We also discussed social factors such as age and gender of teachers and learners and how these are often treated very differently in different societies. In sum, the methods class can provide pre-service teachers with a safe environment in which to explore their developing conceptions of what makes a good (language) teacher and ways in which their teacher identity is influenced by larger social and political structures.

Class discussions and journal entries can highlight pre-service teachers' beliefs about writing instruction, their attitudes to writing and teaching writing and the problems they had with students of different proficiency levels and first language backgrounds. This leads not only to useful discussions (Schön's 'reflection-on-action'), but also changes in the pre-service teachers' strategies ('reflection-in-action'). It also enables the teacher educator to suggest alternative ways for dealing with various issues that pre-service teachers face during their clinical practice. For the teachers of this study, class discussions and my comments on their journals gave them a lens for examining their tutoring experiences while they were engaged in providing their students with collaborative feedback on their developing writing.

Implications for teaching and learning English as a second language

One implication for teaching ESL writing is that expectations and procedures for teacher feedback must be made clear at the beginning of the tutoring arrangement and throughout the semester. For instance, if a teacher plans to have only feedback on content and organization on first drafts but deal with grammar issues on second drafts, she should communicate this early on so as to relieve student anxiety (Ferris, 2003). Similarly, if an instructor chooses to discuss only two or three major writing issues per session, her process should be clearly explained to the student. Differences in expectations can lead to disappointment on the part of both the teacher and the student.

Another implication for teaching ESL writing is that when identifying what to focus on during tutoring sessions, tutors should use the specific writing assignment or task as a starting point. They should get to know the student's abilities as a writer as quickly as possible (Ferris, 2003, pp. 119–122). The requirements of the particular assignment and grading criteria can direct tutors as to what to look for in a given piece

of writing so they can maximize their use of time on issues that matter most. In addition, the teacher needs to consider the individual strengths and weaknesses of the student in order to construct the most helpful possible feedback. For instance, if a student has persistent problems with organizing an essay, the teacher may suggest using an outline as the student drafts his/her essays, or if a student has noticeable weaknesses in proof-reading and editing, the teacher may want to repeatedly call this to the student's attention and provide mini grammar lessons on the most serious grammatical problems.

In general, for teacher feedback to be successful the process should be a two-way one to which both the teacher and the student contribute and from which each benefits. Ferris (2003) stated:

> Writing instructors need to think of written feedback as part of dynamic two-way communication between the teacher and the student. As with any other form of interpersonal communication, the needs and knowledge of the target audience must be considered, and the pragmatic demands of the situation (as to formality, directness, quantity, and relevance) must be kept in mind. When I write comments in response to a student paper, I try to keep two key questions in mind: (a) Does this student have enough background knowledge to understand my intent in this comment? And (b) If the student acts on this comment, will it improve this paper and will it inform his or her writing development? (p. 124)

Generally, a philosophy of second language pedagogy must take into account the powerful effects that culture has on language learning in the ESL classroom. As ESL teachers develop their philosophies about teaching writing to English language learners, they should know how culture influences communication in their classes. They should understand how to draw on students' distinct learning styles, how schema theory can help teachers understand connections between reading and writing and how individual and cultural differences between speaking and writing affect classroom pedagogy (Reid, 1993).

Native and non-native English speaking teachers have much to learn from one another, as they possess strengths that can complement each other. For example, Kamhi-Stein (1999) suggested that pre-service teachers should engage in collaborative projects, including evaluating ESL textbooks and developing instructional materials designed to meet the language needs of a specified student population. These collaborative projects allow non-native English speaking teachers to excel because they have a first-hand understanding of the linguistic, social and cultural needs of their target audience and the language teaching situation. Similarly, the contributions of native English speaking trainee teachers are important because, with their intimate knowledge of what is appropriate in terms of contexts of language use, they can help to define target objectives.

Although providing feedback on student writing may seem tedious and time consuming, articulating one's philosophy regarding ESL writing pedagogy and constructing feedback that is individualized to the specific needs of the student may transform what first appears to be an overwhelming task into a rewarding and beneficial process. When this process is undertaken in the context of teacher education, the teacher educator also contributes to and benefits from this clinical practice and reflection.

Notes

1. Tom and Soo Young had to be assigned to new students because their original students had expectations that clashed with those of their tutors. I discuss these cases later in this paper.
2. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.
3. Writing levels of students roughly correspond to the level of writing classes each student took on the Intensive English Program.

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