

ELLs in the Midwest: Effects of Assessments on Writing Discourse in a Rural Classroom

MARSHALL KLASSEN

Kanazawa Seiryō University

ABSTRACT

This case study investigates the effects of assessments on writing discourse in a mixed classroom of English language learner (ELLs) and English only (EOs) students in rural classrooms in Indiana. The number of ELLs has increased significantly in many parts of rural Indiana over the past two decades. This same population is held accountable by high-stakes tests which are used to show student academic growth and maintain school rankings. Teachers of ELLs strive to find a balance between meeting the needs of their ELL students and high-stakes tests simultaneously. This article explores the effects of assessments on how teachers approach teaching their ELLs, what considerations are made, and how classroom approaches change in light of assessments. Excerpts from interviews with teachers highlight the struggles of classroom teachers, problematizing current trends in teaching ELLs and suggest possible action steps to be taken at the local level.

Keywords: English language learners, rural schools, writing instruction, high-stakes tests, case study

INTRODUCTION

The number of English language learners (ELLs) has been increasing at a blistering pace across the United States, creating an opportunity for growth across the country for teachers to adapt their teaching practices and help these students grow alongside their English Only (EO) students.

Indiana is one of the states that has felt this transformation more keenly with a 408% increase of ELLs over the past decade, many teachers across the state have been challenged to adjust their teaching to this new population of students (Ayres, Waldorf, & McKendree, 2012; Batalova & McHugh, 2010; Indiana Department of Education, 2014; Kindler, 2002; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007; Waldorf, Ayres, & McKendree, 2013). ELLs often bring diversity, multiple perspectives, and experiences into these schools, but teachers may not always be aware of how to approach this challenge, especially when there is a perceived language barrier that may seem insurmountable. Teachers who find these ELLs in their classrooms may be unfamiliar with their language needs, backgrounds and specific challenges. They also may feel anxious, underprepared and overwhelmed with the task of preparing students to perform academically on the same level as their EOs.

In addition to this, teachers are being stretched to fulfill the requirements of high-stakes testing, which are in constant flux. Educators are challenged to help their students meet their potential regarding these assessments by providing appropriate instruction to support their development. While meeting the many needs of these students should trump other concerns, an increasing number of teachers feel pressured to place the requirements of the state assessments before what their students need.

State assessments are becoming more frequent and high-stakes, placing more pressure on both students and schools. The Indiana Statewide Test of Educational Progress (ISTEP+) test and End of Course Assessments (ECAs) at the high school level, for example, reports student achievement levels for each school according to the Indiana Academic Standards adopted by the Indiana State Board of Education. Passing the English language arts and Math ECA is a requirement for graduation. These assessments start in grade 3, and continue until grade 10

(“ISTEP+ Grades 3-8, 10,” 2017). Grade 3 and grade 5 assessments for ELA are separated into eight strands and divided into four categories, across reading and writing. ISTEP+ writing assessments, for example, include a passage (or pair of passages) on which to base their writing upon (“ISTEP+ English/Language Arts Assessment for Grades 3-8,” 2016). Teachers must balance what they will need for the tests with what they believe their students need to become better writers.

Teachers of ELLs undoubtedly face many challenges, particularly when it comes to teaching writing. Teachers may perceive distance between their ELLs students and themselves, for socio-economic or cultural reasons (Zeichner, 2009), may believe that teaching ELLs is “not their job” (Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson–Gonzalez, 2008; Thomas & Vanderhaar, 2008; Valdés & Castellón, 2010; Zhang, 2013), or may think that “just good teaching” (de Jong & Harper, 2005) appropriately meets the needs of their ELL and English Only (EO) mixed classrooms. The teaching of writing is becoming ever more important in recent years for both EO and ELL students in light of the greater implementation of high-stakes testing, teacher evaluations being tied to student growth, particularly when policies such as No Child Left Behind waivers ignore factors affecting student backgrounds, such as poverty, ELL or special education status (Burke, Morita-Mullaney & Singh, 2016; Morita-Mullaney, Gilmetdinova, & Klassen, 2014). The teaching of writing in elementary settings is often overlooked as well, particularly concerning ELLs (Larsen, 2014). Teachers of writing who support ELLs need to have training in writing pedagogy, as well as theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), sociolinguistics, ELL development and writing (Coady, Harper, & de Jong, 2011; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Harper & de Jong, 2004).

Many teachers find themselves in the midst of communities that are growing more and more diverse, and their teacher preparation programs, be it pre-service or in-service, did not address topics such as multiculturalism, bilingualism, or specialized writing approaches for ELLs (Tanenbaum et al., 2012), which is even more common for rural school districts (Berurbe, 2000). There is limited research in the area of elementary writing for ELLs, particularly in rural areas (Larsen, 2014; Yoesel, 2010). These ELLs are less likely to have teachers that are trained in meeting the needs of ELL learners, fewer support systems in place, and fewer sympathizers to learning a second language, especially in writing in a second language (Magrath et al., 2003; Menken & Antunex, 2001; Yoesel, 2010). Teachers may also hold beliefs about their ELLs that may interfere in serving their students' needs, such as making assumptions that historic best practices in a mixed EO and ELL classroom is sufficient (de Jong & Harper, 2005).

PURPOSE OF STUDY

This study focused on the spoken discourse of elementary teachers in the classroom as they discussed their writing approaches with their ELLs. This study focused on two teachers with a large number of ELLs in their classrooms, at two crucial levels of writing instruction: grades three and five. The purpose of this study was:

- to investigate how teachers perceive and address the needs of ELLs with their writing and linguistic development
- to observe how teachers perceive the pressures of testing and how it connects with ELL teaching

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding what is happening in Indiana's rural schools in regards to elementary writing can illustrate how teachers are striving to address the needs of their students, school districts and

high-stakes testing. As high-stakes tests continue to increase, there is more focus on areas that are particularly difficult for ELLs, such as writing. This literature review will highlight the research concerning these difficulties and considerations that should be made for ELL education.

ELLs in Indiana Rural Schools

ELLs are increasingly moving into Indiana's rural schools, where the population of ELLs in schools can be as high as 25% in some elementary classrooms (Indiana Department of Education [IDOE]: Compass, 2015). In comparison to urban settings, the number of ELLs may be higher, but the proportion of ELLs in rural settings may be higher, which may cause difficulties for teachers due to the lack of familiarity with the background and lived experiences of their students, less experience and preparation in teaching this diverse group of students, and fewer support systems when compared to urban school settings (Berube, 2000; Hill & Flynn, 2004; Yoesel, 2010). Despite this, teachers need to serve these populations equitably in their classrooms, particularly in the area of writing, one of the most demanding areas of literacy and language development (Berube, 2000; Larsen, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2004).

Rural schools may benefit from factors such as smaller class size and more tightly-knit communities, but these schools offer many challenges as well. Rural schools must deal with little support for students from different language backgrounds or lived experiences, few opportunities for professional development and few programs to help students with specific educational needs, such as ELLs (Flynn & Hill, 2005; Huang, 1999; Yoesel, 2010). ELL or multilingual education teachers or specialists are rare in rural districts, compared to urban or suburban districts, and without these specialists, the responsibility is placed in the hands of the entire school staff, who have limited preparation and/or varying degrees of motivation in supporting ELLs in their

language development (Berube, 2000; Flynn & Hill, 2005; Gruber, Wiley, Broughman, Stizek, & Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002; Yoesel, 2010).

The needs of ELL students may be unidentified by teachers who find them in the classroom (Fillmore & Snow, 2000), particularly when concerning the teaching of academic language, which differs from the everyday language used by students and requires additional and distinctive linguistic supports (Brisk, 2015; Cummins, 2008; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Gibbons, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004). The National Center for Education Statistics stated that 82 percent of rural teachers had never participated in professional development (PD) regarding the needs of ELL students (Gruber, et al., 2002), and recent reports of schools receiving improvement grants reported that ELL-related PD accounted for less than 20 percent of their total PD hours (Boyle et al., 2014), which shows a need for this type of study.

Teaching Writing to ELLs. Writing skills are one of the most daunting areas for ELLs to improve in, and an area that teachers lack confidence and feel unprepared to teach (Larsen, 2014). Teachers need awareness of how writing progression differs for ELLs, challenges of second language writing, methods of differentiating instruction to address gaps in writing, and how to support students with both languages to improve writing instruction and outcomes (Brisk, 2015, Tomlinson, 1999). Teachers with limited preparation or background in the area of writing will default to writing instruction designed for EO students (Larsen, 2014), such as writing approaches like the Six Traits focusing on the key ingredients of writing (Spandel, 2005), falling back on the well believed myth of “just good teaching” (de Jong & Harper, 2005). Teachers

benefit from understanding the differences between spoken language and written language (Schleppegrell, 2004).

Writing tasks in many classrooms may seemingly be shrouded in mystery due to unclear expectations of writing, lack of model texts, failing to provide explicit directions to achieve promising writing practices, or unclear instructions for writing, among other things. For instance, metaphors often used by teachers to express expectations of writing such as *use your own words* or *write clearly* may be confusing for ELLs (Schleppegrell, 2004). If teachers themselves lack the linguistic knowledge about the features of language such as organization, differences between academic and informal language, and explicit modeling of language, this may make the needs of ELLs invisible to their teachers, who need to guide their students in this specialized form of language (Christie, 1991, p.220). This linguistic gap can be exacerbated by additional factors such as a mismatch of culture between ELLs, teachers and EO students, differences in socioeconomic status and life experiences, or different language backgrounds (Cummins, 2001; Heath, 1983; Schleppegrell & de Oliveira, 2006; Valdés, 2001; Zeichner, 2009).

High-Stakes Testing and ELLs. Despite additional challenges that ELLs face, instead of more appropriate alternative assessments, they are subjected to the same high-stakes testing of EOs, but may not receive the support that they would require to reach the expectations of the tests, especially in rural settings (Gottlieb, 2006; Yoesel, 2010). ELL performance on high-stakes tests is crucial to show growth in order to fulfill school initiated growth models and No Child Left Behind waivers instituted in many Indiana schools (Morita-Mullaney, Gilmetdinova, & Klassen, 2014; IDOE, 2011; Wright, 2015). This is leading even further towards test-oriented teaching, where showing growth can only be done through assessments (Ravitch, 2010). There have been many concerns about the validity of these tests for ELLs (Zacher Pandya, 2011), and

how these current assessment practices may lead teachers to ignore “their vision of best practice” and treat students differently than they would without the pressures of the assessments (Valli & Buese, 2007, p. 520). Furthermore, high-stakes testing effects how ELLs are taught, pressuring teachers and “standardized tests become *de facto* language policy when attached to high-stakes testing consequences, shaping what contents schools teach, how it is taught, by whom it is taught, and in what language(s) it is taught” (Menken, 2006, p. 537).

METHODOLOGY

A multiple case study model was chosen for this research project, as examples and themes from multiple case studies are often more compelling and robust (Yin, 2009). This method of inquiry was chosen to explore how two elementary teachers perceive and approach their ELL students, as well as how the needs of students are constructed and interpreted. The process of “how” and “why” teachers come to these conclusions can be brought into greater focus through a case study (Merriam, 1997; Yin, 2009). By observing how these teachers construct their knowledge about needs, perceptions of abilities, and goals of their students, we can see how this can be reflected in teaching approaches concerning this population.

These interviews focused on the self-perceptions of their teaching practices, self-reported interactions with ELLs, how they perceived the needs of ELLs and how they addressed these needs. Interviews focused on discourse about writing observed in classrooms populated with ELLs and EOs. During these interviews, open-ended questions and member checking of interview transcripts read together with the researcher and participants were utilized to prompt teachers to self-reflect and comment on classroom practices, thought processes, and their conceptualization of current practices that were observed in the classroom. There were a total of six interviews, three per teacher, ranging from 30-60 minutes for each interview. This research

also included research notes, memos, classroom photos, classroom artifacts, as well as supplementary descriptions using detailed descriptions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Background of the Study

The site of study was a small rural school on the outskirts of a small Midwest city called Eagleland (pseudonym), located about 100 miles away from one of the largest cities in the Midwest, part of a large school community with 3 other elementary schools in the area, and ranked as an “A” school from 2011 to 2014 (IDOE: Compass, 2015). The population of the school is fairly small, with 400 students: 51% receiving free or reduced lunch, with 40% of students being Hispanic and multiracial, and 25% of all students classified as ELLs, although the observed classrooms constituted a higher percentage (IDOE: Compass, 2015). The Hispanic population increased shortly before 2000, accounting for 21.6% of the community population (US Census, 2010).

The teachers in this study have lived in this area throughout their teaching careers, and have attended schools in this region for their pre-and post-service education. The fifth grade teacher, who had worked at this school for the past 27 years, and the third grade teacher had three years’ experience at this school, which was her first position after graduating from a local state university. At the time of research, there was a large percentage of ELLs attending Eagleland (25%), with the observed classrooms having a much higher proportion relative to their elementary colleagues. These ELLs were reported by the teachers to be ranging from level two (beginning) through five (bridging). The third grade teacher reported a majority of level five students, while the fifth grade teacher reported a majority of level four students. These levels are based on Indiana’s English Language Proficiency Standards (Gottlieb, Cranley, & Cammilleri,

2010), and were reported by the teachers during interviews. Table 1.1 is based on the information collected through interviews with teachers.

Table 1.1

Teacher Profiles

	Third Grade Teacher	Fifth Grade Teacher
Years' Experience Teaching at Eagleland Elementary	3 years (Recent Graduate of Local State University)	27 years
Students (English Language Learner [ELL] and English Only [EO] students)	10 ELL 10 EO	15 ELL 8 EO
ELL Levels	LV 2-2 LV 3-2 LV 4-2 LV 5-4	LV 2-1 LV 4-14
Percent ELLs in class	50%	65%
Experience teaching	3 years	27 years

FINDINGS

There were a number of relevant factors that had an effect on writing discourse according to the interviews of these teachers. The most relevant findings will be discussed in the following themes. *Inappropriate assessments for ELLs* will discuss the perceptions that teachers had about forcing high stakes assessments created for EOs on their ELLs. *Just good teaching and differentiated instruction* illustrates their beliefs about the best way to approach both ELLs and EOs in their classrooms, and how differentiated instruction is utilized and perceived. *Good writer versus good tester* contrasts the struggle in teaching students to improve their abilities, or to teach to the test in order to become good writers, and *changing tests* portrays how they

struggle with meeting the requirements of high-stakes testing despite these being in flux at the time of this research.

Inappropriate Assessments for ELLs

Teachers had many reservations in administering high-stakes tests to their students, and despite the opinion that these assessments were felt to be inappropriate even for some EO students, ELLs were regarded as being particularly marginalized by these tests. One major criticism of the test was the inclusion of a reading passage in order to complete the writing prompt: "...their writing test has become a reading and comprehension test, so even if they are good writers you are not going to see that..." Another criticism made by the fifth grade teacher was the nature of the writing prompts not being "purposeful." They meant a writing prompt that was not relevant to the reality that their students lived, which was contrary to the test design to provide a "purposeful writing task":

...that's what I didn't like about *assessment* is the purposeful writing—what they are given to write about sometimes—it's like really? That's the best you can come up with?...I think the way that they score it and everything, it doesn't teach purposeful writing at all...

(November 18, 2014)

Regardless of the inappropriate nature of the assessments for their ELLs, teachers feel that if they differentiate their instruction too radically for their ELLs, it will do them a disservice, since both ELLs and EO students are ultimately subjected to the same assessments.

Just Good Teaching and Differentiated Instruction

The teachers in this study perceived that the needs of ELLs and EOs overlapped with each other, which has been problematized by ELL educators (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Harper & de Jong,

2004). The idea that both groups will be subjected to the same assessment leads to the idea of meeting needs that all students share, across the board. According to the third grade teacher:

I don't differentiate for ELLs versus my other students for writing because when it comes to the test they all have to do the same thing without accommodations – there is not an accommodation for writing, and as far as differentiating for them—maybe more vocabulary help, but at this stage they all need vocabulary (October, 14th, 2014)

This teacher perceives that since both groups are taking the same assessment, and that student needs are similar: “they all need vocabulary” (October, 14, 2014), that the same teaching approaches are warranted for her students.

Since many of the ELLs in the classrooms are performing at similar levels as the EOs in the third grade classroom, the idea of accommodations was unnecessary, and that both groups had the same needs: “There is nothing more that my ELL kids need that the white kids [EOs] don't....my accommodations are across-the-board—it's for all of them—they need that help” (October, 14, 2014). These “across-the-board” accommodations included reading tasks based on their reading level, but did not make any differentiations for ELLs language background, for example. She had connected the practice of writing with reading which is shown to be beneficial for EO students (Calkins, 1996) but for ELL students, differentiated instruction using additional resources and guidance is often needed.

Differentiation for the third grade teacher is an area in which she shows apprehension, unsure of whether or not differentiation is desirable and has not been given models of how to differentiate her practice. According to this teacher when asked about writing differentiation: “My writing does not change...I said (to the Eagleland Elementary Principal) I do not

differentiate their instruction...I'm not even sure what I would do to differentiate for them” (October, 14, 2014).

These perceptions are not limited to the third grade teacher, but extends to the fifth grade classroom. She shared similar ideas about ELLs needs not differing from EOs in her classroom. There are some approaches that could be interpreted as differentiated approaches for ELLs, such as providing visuals accompanying her instruction, but mentions that this is something that she does for all students, especially visual learners, when teaching other subjects such as mathematics. According to the fifth grade teacher, diversification of instruction has been useful in a writing lesson: “I have some kids that are visual learners...and sometimes even with writing the kids like a visual...some kids just don't have the background so you give them things to look at or read that gives them the background...” (November, 18, 2014). Within classroom observations, this could be seen as well, showing a video about scuba diving before starting a writing prompt about scuba diving.

This teacher does recognize that some students have different educational backgrounds and must provide additional diversified instruction, especially in the context of writing. The fifth grade teacher acknowledges that especially when first generation immigrants who do not share the knowledge of academic language in their L2, but do have this knowledge in their L1, diversification is important, and cited an instance of accommodating students with the same textbook used in classes in their L1 which allowed them to focus on “just the content”, and commented that it was “it was nice that they could stay right with us”, lamenting that “and of course it's not offered by our schools...because we just don't have the numbers...and the teacher...is here half the day” (October, 14, 2014).

These teachers do see a need in diversifying instruction for ELLs due to different language backgrounds and/or students who are still developing language skills, but are reluctant to do so due to the assessments, and the perceptions that EOs share the same gaps that ELLs do. When teachers do diversify instruction for ELLs, they justify this as not doing so because of their different language backgrounds or developing language, but because EO students need the same instruction. Teachers need to be aware of their options when diversifying instruction, and how they can do so in light of these high-stakes assessments. However, the overwhelming pressure being put on teachers to prepare students for the assessments overshadows the entire process of teaching writing, leaving them little leeway in making considerations for their most vulnerable students.

Good Writer versus Good Tester

Teachers often found the idea of preparing students to pass tests and become good writers to be at odds with each other. The third grade teacher expressed the idea that fulfilling the requirements of the assessments robbed the students of genuine opportunities for growth, through more meaningful activities. According to her, “My personal opinion is there is a way to teach students to be good writers and there is a way to teach students to pass a writing test” (October, 14, 2014). Despite their professional opinions about what is best for students, teachers claimed that their own teaching practices were unhelpful or potentially harmful for their ELLs, but were continued in order to meet the needs of the assessments. When discussing preparing ELLs for a four-page writing prompt involving reading an article and responding, the teacher comments:

We are not teaching them to be good writers...I’m trying to prepare them for those tests but at the same time it’s not helping them become better writers...I teach the six traits

which is what we're supposed to do but that does not make them ready for this test. That (six traits) makes them good writers. That is two different skills. (November, 18, 2014)

ELLs need to make improvements in their scores each year in order to fulfill school growth models and No Child Left Behind waivers, as well as maintain the reputation of their schools and teachers (Morita-Mullaney, Gilmetdinova, & Klassen, 2014; IDOE, 2011; Wright, 2015). For ELLs in particular, the focus on preparing them for tests at the expense of improving their writing is keenly felt by the teacher, and is aware of the inappropriateness of teaching to the test for these students, but despite teachers clearly seeing growth in their ELLs, this cannot be shown unless it is done so through testing. Although alternative assessments such as portfolios, visual creations and other formative assessments are recommended to teachers of ELLs (Gottlieb, 2006), teachers claim that the tests are how growth is indicated in their school districts, and alternatives are not available or are not made available by school administration.

Many scholars have voiced concerns about invalid tests for ELLs and the negative effects these may have (Zacher Pandya, 2011; Wright, 2015), with both teachers coming to this same conclusion that teaching to the test may not be beneficial to their students. The third grade teacher was preparing students for their first state administered assessment and discussed her conflict in meeting the needs of her ELL students within the larger goal of preparing students for the test, instead of their understanding of the material.

It says to use pictures for the ELL and the special ed[ucation] which is the majority of my class. It's not helping them to the test *at all*. Are they becoming better writers because they can see details? *Yes*, but it doesn't matter if they're good writers if they're still failing the test. (October, 14, 2014)

Despite the growth and development the teacher can see in the amount of details produced by students due to this accommodation, but expressed frustration that this cannot be shown through the assessments. Despite the importance that the teachers put towards meeting the needs of these tests, they are justifiably skeptical about the assessments themselves, with one reason being the recent change in the test.

Changing Tests

For third grade students, their first standardized test was recently updated, with teachers being unaware of the focus of the new test, and were concerned about the new requirements of these assessments. Both teachers expressed their frustration with the lack of clarity about the tests and the constantly flux of assessments. According to the third grade teacher:

It's a completely different process to be a good writer or to pass the test, it's not the same thing... my focus was to pass the test last year, this year we don't know what the test is.

We have no idea... I'm on the writing committee so we have no clue...we are shooting in the dark to make sure that our kids are as prepared as they can be... (December, 11, 2014)

This quotation shows that the third grade teacher is concerned about passing the test, despite the different process required to be a good writer or good tester. Although the difference in the test is unknown, she continues to be compelled to “shoot in the dark”.

Despite having little information about what the test contains although she is a member of the school writing committee, she still strives to focus instruction on approaches that may (or may not) help their students pass the test, even though it is seemingly a constantly moving target. These foci were school wide initiative that were implemented across grades to help teachers attain these achievement goals, despite the unclear objectives of the tests. Despite their

frustration with the state-mandated assessments and how these negatively influence their instruction, they begrudgingly acquiesce and continue to teach towards the presumed writing test targets.

DISCUSSION

There are several important findings from this research. First, the influence of high-stakes testing can be seen in many decisions made around the teaching of writing to ELLs. In fact in some cases, it can be the major concern when deciding the goals of lessons, and approach for teaching. This leads to an even greater focus on prioritizing test performance, and consequently test-oriented teaching (Ravitch, 2010). Even more teachers will consciously ignore the writing practices and approaches that they feel will help their students in the long term for short-term gains. Teachers need to have measures available to them to have the opportunity to show where ELLs are making growth other than the state-mandated assessments, which may be inappropriate for their students. Therefore, more flexibility in fulfilling the growth models established by schools are necessary, and greater awareness and implementation of alternative methods of assessment, particularly in the area of writing, are needed. High-stakes testing is becoming increasingly more commonplace across the country, and while this may not change in the coming years, teachers can still conduct their classes in the best interests of their students, fight for alternative means of writing assessment for their ELLs, and become agents of change in their school corporations (Gottlieb, 2006).

Second, even if teachers are aware that teaching to the test is underserving their students, teachers feel forced to administer the same tests despite their better judgement, leaving teachers to rely on “just good teaching” (de Jong & Harper, 2005) rather than specialized support to ELLs. Although teachers may be aware that their students may need more support to take full of

advantage of instruction by the teacher, the idea of diversifying their approaches may be thought of as potentially disadvantaging their ELLs further, regardless of what is recommended for teaching ELLs (Gibbons, 2002, 2006). Teachers may even be forced into going against what they know may shortchange their ELLs' writing development, in exchange for a chance to score better on the assessments. Therefore, methods of teaching writing to ELLs must be included in all teacher education programs, not just for ELL teachers. Models of diversified instruction, writing workshops and other methods of writing intervention must also be made available to teachers in their pre-service and in-service education.

In addition to this, teachers need to be more aware of the differences that ELLs bring to the classroom. School districts and administrators must be more active in providing teachers with different approaches to assessments, teaching and interventions with specialized personnel, especially in rural districts. ESL specialists must be able to coordinate with teachers to determine the needs concerning ELL writing, and cooperate to conduct teaching interventions and provide writing support in and outside of the classroom. Teaching accommodations and alternate assessments must be made available according to the advice of ESL specialists and their teachers, supported by their school districts.

Finally, even in cases when specific aims of tests are unknown due to changes in tests and unknown assessments, teachers still strive to teach to the test, focusing on what is dictated by their school districts or administrators. Test makers and administrators must be ready to help prepare teachers, provide adequate professional development and clear expectations concerning writing for students and educators before teachers begin planning curriculum. Greater transparency in how writing tests are evaluated and how these factor into school initiated growth models must be shared with teachers and students. Test creators must also ensure that tests

provide opportunities for meaningful, purposeful writing that do not advantage certain students over others.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that these teachers feel pulled in two directions: they strive to meet the needs of the assessments due to pressures from their school districts and to help their students succeed, but at the same time, teachers are aware that their ELLs linguistic development can be better served with different approaches to writing rather than a test-oriented approach. Despite this, they feel that they must meet the needs of both groups of ELLs and EOs simultaneously, lack confidence in providing differentiated writing instruction, and need alternative models of assessment and teaching approaches that they will feel confident in implementing.

This study portrayed two teachers who genuinely care about and are concerned about the struggles of all of their students, especially ELLs, who are working within a system that favors showing growth through prescribed testing channels, and are offered no alternatives. In rural schools, this is even more keenly felt, due to the lack of availability of support from the school district (Berube, 2000; Yoesel, 2010). This study highlighted the struggles that teachers faced in their teaching and what elements of the assessments are the biggest hindrance to serving their students most effectively. This case study showed that when the focal teachers are posed with the challenges of meeting the needs of writing assessments and what is best for their student's writing development, they begrudgingly acquiesce to high-stakes test oriented teaching, but want to give ELLs what they need to improve their writing development above all.

Marshall D. Klassen is an Assistant Professor (Ph.D. Purdue University, 2015) at Kanazawa Seiryō University. His research interests include English language learners, genre pedagogy, second language writing, second language acquisition and study abroad.

Inquiries should be directed to marshall.klassen@gmail.com

REFERENCES

- Ayres, J., Waldorf, B., & McKendree, M. (2012). *Defining rural Indiana—The first step*. (EC-766-W). Retrieved from <http://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/EC/EC-766-W.pdf>.
- Batalova, J., & McHugh, M. (2010). Number and growth of students in US schools in need of English instruction. *Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute*.
- Berube, B. (2000). *Managing ESL Programs in Rural and Small Urban Schools*: Alexandria, VA: TESOL.
- Boyle, A., Golden, L., LeFloch, K.C., O'Day, J., Harris, B., Wissel, S., & Wei, T. (2014). Building teacher capacity to support English language learners in schools receiving school improvement grants. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20154004/pdf/20154004.pdf>
- Brisk, M. E. (2015). *Engaging students in academic literacies: Genre-based pedagogy for K-5 classrooms*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burke, A. M., Morita-Mullaney, T., & Singh, M. (2016). Indiana Emergent Bilingual Student Time to Reclassification: A Survival Analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 53(5), 1310-1342. doi:10.3102/0002831216667481
- Calkins, L. M. (1996). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Christie, F. (1991). Pedagogical and content registers in a writing lesson. *Linguistics and Education*, 3(3), 203-224. DOI: 10.1016/0898-5898(91)90008-7

- Coady, M., Harper, C., & de Jong, E. (2011). From preservice to practice: Mainstream elementary teacher beliefs of preparation and efficacy with English language learners in the State of Florida. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 34(2), 223-239. DOI: 10.1080/15235882.2011.597823
- de Jong, E., & Harper, C. (2005). Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners: Is being a good teacher good enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(2), 101 -124. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23478724>
- Fillmore, L. W., Snow, C. E., & Educational Resources Information Center (2000). *What teachers need to know about language*. [Washington, DC]: U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Educational Resources Information Center.
- Flynn, K., & Hill, J. (2005). English language learners: A growing population. *Policy Brief: Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning*, 1-12.
- Gibbons, P. (2002). *Scaffolding language, scaffolding learning: Teaching second language learners in the mainstream classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann
- Gibbons, P. (2006). *Bridging discourses in the ESL classroom: Students, teachers and researchers*. London, UK: Continuum.
- Gibbons, P. (2009). *English learners, academic literacy, and thinking: Learning in the challenge zone*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gottlieb, M. (2006). *Assessing English language learners: Bridges from language proficiency to academic achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

- Gottlieb, M., Cranley, E. M., & Cammilleri, A. (2010). *English language proficiency standards and resource guide: Prekindergarten through grade 12*. Madison, WI: Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harper, C., & de Jong, E. (2004). Misconceptions about teaching English-Language learners. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(2). DOI: 10.1598/JAAL.48.2.6
- Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Huang, G. G. (1999). *Sociodemographic changes: Promise and problems for rural education*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 425 048.
- Indiana Department of Education. (2014). English Learner and Title III Director's Meeting. Retrieved from https://learningconnection.doe.in.gov/Library/FilingCabinet/ViewFileDetail.aspx?lfid=74370&et=USER_GROUP&eid=317&clid&ret=~/UserGroup/GroupDetailFileBookmarks.aspx?gid%3D317%26ugfid%3D11345
- IDOE: Compass. (n.d.). Retrieved October 16, 2015. Retrieved from <http://compass.doe.in.gov/dashboard/overview.aspx>
- ISTEP+ Grades 3-8, 10. (2017, August 31). Retrieved from www.doe.in.gov/assessment/istep-grades-3-8-10.

- ISTEP+ English/Language Arts Assessment for Grades 3-8. (2016). Retrieved from <http://www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/assessment/istep-elagrades-3-8item-sampler2016-17final.pdf>
- Kindler, A. L. (2002). Survey of the states' limited English proficient students and available educational programs and services: 2000–2001 summary report. *Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 8.*
- Larsen, D. (2014). *L2 Writing in elementary school: Challenges for teachers and learners*. Paper presented at 48th Annual TESOL Convention in Portland, OR.
- Lee, J. S., & Oxelson, E. (2006). "It's Not My Job": K-12 teacher attitudes toward students' heritage language maintenance. *Bilingual Research Journal, 30*(2), 453-477. DOI: 10.1080/15235882.2006.10162885
- Lucas, T., Villegas, A. M., & Freedson-Gonzalez, M. (2008). Linguistically responsive teacher education: Preparing classroom teachers to teach English language learners. *Journal of Teacher Education, 59*, 361-373. DOI: 10.1177/0022487108322110
- Magrath, C., Ackerman, A., Branch, T., Clinton Bristow, J., Shade, L., & Elliott, J. (2003). *The neglected "R": The need for a writing revolution. The National Commission on Writing*. New York, NY: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Menken, K. (2006). Teaching to the test: How No Child Left Behind impacts language policy, curriculum, and instruction for English language learners. *Bilingual Research Journal, 30*, 521-546. DOI: 10.1080/15235882.2006.10162888
- Menken, K., & Antunez, B. (2001). *An Overview of the preparation and certification of teachers working with limited English proficient (LEP) students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

- Merriam, S. B. (1997). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. London, UK: Sage.
- Morita-Mullaney, T., Gilmetdinova, A., & Klassen, M., (2014). *The (in)flexibility of the NCLB waivers for ELs in rural schools: Indiana administrators in focus*. Presentation at INTESOL, November 15, 2014 in Indianapolis, IN.
- National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, (2007). *The growing numbers of limited English proficient students*.
- Ravitch, D. (2011). *The death and life of the American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Schleppegrell, M. J. (2004). *The language of schooling: A functional linguistics perspective*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Schleppegrell, M. J., & de Oliveira, L. C. (2006). An integrated language and content approach for history teachers. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 5(4), 254-268. DOI: 10.1016/j.jeap.2006.08.003
- Spandel, V. (2005). *Creating writers: through 6-trait writing assessment and instruction*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Tanenbaum, C., Boyle, A., Soga, K., Le Floch, K. C., Golden, L., Petroccia, M., . . . O'Day, J. (2012). National Evaluation of Title III Implementation: Report on State and Local Implementation. *Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, US Department of Education*.

- Thomas, S., & Vanderhaar, J. (2008). Negotiating resistance to multiculturalism in a teacher education curriculum: A case study. *Teacher Educator*, 43(3), 173-197. DOI: 10.1080/08878730802055057
- Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2010). *American FactFinder - Results: Cass County, IN*. Retrieved January 25, 2015, from <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>.
- Valdés, G. (2001). *Learning and not learning English: Latino students in American schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Valdés, G., & Castellón, M. (2011). English language learners in American schools. In T. Lucas (Ed.), *Teacher preparation for linguistically diverse classrooms: A resource for teacher educators* (pp. 18 - 34). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Valli, L., & Buese, D. (2007). The changing roles of teachers in an era of high-stakes accountability. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44, 519–558. DOI: 10.3102/0002831207306859
- Waldorf, B., Ayres, J., & McKendree, M. (2013). *Population trends in rural Indiana. (ED-767-W)*. Retrieved from <https://www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/EC/EC-767-W.pdf>.
- Wright, W. E. (2015). *Beware of the VAM: Valued-Added measures for teacher accountability*. Retrieved October 10, 2015, from <http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/beware-vam-valued-added-measures-teacher-accountability>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

- Yoesel, M. R. W. (2010). *Mainstreamed English language instruction in a low-incidence rural school district: a case study*. University of Missouri--Columbia.
- Zacher Pandya, J. (2011). *Overtested: How high-stakes accountability fails English language learners*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Zeichner, K. M. (2009). *Teacher education and the struggle for social justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Zhang, S. S. V. (2013). Learning to teach English-language learners in mainstreamed secondary classrooms. *Teacher Education and Practice*, 26(1), 99-116.