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WRITE IN FRONT OF US: CREATING LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMPOSITION CLASSROOMS

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COMPOSITION CLASSROOMS

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Introduction

During my early days as a student teacher, I once asked my cooperating teacher how he approached teaching diverse classrooms. He told me, simply, "You have to teach the students in front of you." He then explained, "If you don't adapt to the ways they learn, then you're not actually teaching them anything, you're just spouting information that you want to hear." He was right. The faces of our classrooms continue to grow increasingly diverse, as do the experiences, needs, and strengths of the students. This pattern applies not only to primary and secondary education levels but to collegiate levels as well. This increasingly complex makeup of writing classrooms prompts instructors with challenges that many feel underprepared to handle sufficiently, leaving many students underserved in their educational experiences.

One of the main factors of this difficulty stems from differing linguistic backgrounds among the student population of a course. Categorizing students by this criterion, two main groups arise: native English speakers (NESs) and English language learners (ELLs). While NES includes anyone who learns English as a first language, an ELL specifically refers to any "nonnative speaker of English whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may limit his or her ability to (1) achieve in classrooms where English is the language of instruction and (2) access opportunities to fully participate in society" (Bergey et al. 3). Most of the research surrounding linguistically diverse classrooms focuses primarily on instructing ELLs without regard to their roles in conjunction with their native English-speaking peers, unless doing so to show a disparity between the two populations.

For instance, in their article, "The Web of Reclassification for English Language Leaners," Irina Okhremtchouk, Jennifer Levine-Smith, and Adam Clark reveal that ELLs often feel segregated from their NES classmates, especially if they have prior experience in the United States' public education system, a segregation that typically continues in institutions of higher education and limits growth for all students (7). While it is important that the needs of ELLs gain attention and garner new solutions, it is also important to do so with the mindset that this population is not a problem to be fixed (Bergey et al. 3). Instead, the population should be seen as one to adopt into the larger mainstream classroom, one that offers as many advantages to its academic community as it does unique challenges. In his chapter, "Teaching Composition in the Multilingual World: Second Language Writing in Composition Studies," Paul Matsuda, a leading scholar in second language education studies, provides insights into various factors contributing to this academic gap between ELLs and their NES peers, such as imbalanced instructor preparation and irrelevant learning objectives (45-47). In making this argument, he also supports the need to investigate further these imbalanced experiences and performances (48-51). The gap that forms out of this imbalance warrants attention and efforts toward resolutions.

The overarching goal of this essay seeks to help fill in this gap by determining similarities and differences in the academic experiences of ELLs and language majority students, particularly within the context of composition classrooms. To do so, my research then juxtaposes their experiences with professor experiences, needs, and suggestions for best practices. In order to accomplish this goal, this essay draws from surveys I conducted at John Carroll University (JCU) to build connections between the

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local context of first-year writing (FYW) at JCU and the broader body of research on ELLs. One survey targeted composition instructors and a second survey targeted first-year and second-year JCU students; collectively, these surveys reveal insights into the expectations and experiences of both professors and students with regards to successful experiences with teaching and learning in multilingual and mixed ability classrooms. The hope of this project, then, is to lessen classroom barriers between linguistically differing students and their instructors, as well as between the various populations of students.

Literature Review

Scholarship performed in recent years concerning English language learners tends to align with three main concerns: the growing population of ELLs, the challenges of teaching this population in both specialized and mainstream classrooms, and suggested methods for instruction. While this essay endeavors to look at means of bettering the educational experiences of both native and non-native English speakers, doing so first requires reviewing the literature pertaining to ELLs, since they represent the component causing and requiring changes within mainstream classrooms. In an effort to thoroughly address this issue, this section will review the growing ELL population and subsequent achievement gap, the need to reevaluate instruction, and the multilingual implications specifically for composition studies and instruction.

Growing ELL Populations & Achievement Gaps

The ELL population represents a growing and complex group of students. Recalling the ELL definition provided by Bergey et al. as including someone whose limited English skills reduce their achievement in classrooms and society (3), statistics provided by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) become especially

informative. According to the NCES, ELLs comprised 6-21 percent of their states' public school student populations in the fall of 2015 ("English Language Learners"). Looking more closely at the provided range, which seems broad, 14 of those states (as well as the District of Columbia) had 6-10 percent of their study body comprised of ELLs, while eight states had over 10 percent, with some states like California having 21 percent ("English Language Learners"). The number of students who are limited in both the classroom and society stresses the importance of addressing their needs.

A study performed in 2012 by Grantmakers for Education (GFE) highlights a pattern that makes the statistics from the NCES even more pressing: the ELL population in grades K-12 has grown by 60 percent over the last decade, even though the general student population only grew about seven percent, making it the fastest growing student population within schools. Furthermore, their limited language transfers into direct limitations in accessing their academics and communities, leaving ELLs to be "disproportionately underserved and underachieving" (Chao et al. 4). While the scope of their study included grades K-12, those numbers do, of course, impact the demographics within higher education as well. While the GFE does point out legislation that garnered more supportive services for ELLs, such as No Child Left Behind (4), those provisions only cover students through high school; as for the ways in which ELLs "should be assessed, monitored, and served in colleges and universities," no state or federal regulations exists (Bergey et al. 7). One of the main areas the earlier level services support is "College readiness and/or access" (Chao et al. 11), but often ELLs still struggle once in college.

The achievement gap between ELLs and their native English-speaking peers increases as students advance in grade levels, lending to the trend of disproportionate dropout rates in both high school and college levels (Chao et al. 6). The evolution of the label "long-term English learners," referring to students who have studied in US schools for over six years without achieving proficiency in the language, and subsequently in their academics (6), further demonstrates the lack of success in addressing these learners' needs. In their article on the cycles of ELL classification, Okhremtchouk et al. explain the impact having an ELL label in earlier education levels has on students beyond those grades. Their explanation of this trend deserves to be quoted at length:

> Although carrying an ELL classification in the short run can support ELL students' academic trajectories, the long-term impacts of ELL classification and, therefore, in-school stratification practices affect students' academic trajectories as well as college and career opportunities (Kanno & Harklau, 2012; Núñez, Rios-Agular, Kanno, & Flores, 2016). For example, many long-term ELL students take ELD [English language development] classes at the expense of other content areas and are denied access to college-track courses while still classified as ELL, which puts them behind their peers in ways that may be impossible to overcome (Callahan, 2005; Kanno & Kangas, 2014). This has the secondary impact of segregating students by language ability, depriving them of access to the kinds of scaffolding that students with differing language skills can provide for each other (Gándara et al., 2003). (7)

The segregation that begins in these earlier years becomes easily repeatable at the college level, furthering the difficulties of addressing their needs for success.

One attempt to address this gap between language minority students and their counterparts at the college level comes through developmental English classes. Though well intentioned, studies show that many students are less likely to continue their education if enrolled in these classes (compared to ELLs who do not enroll in them), and have lower enrollment in credit-bearing English courses (qtd. in Bergey 7-8). Regardless

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of enrollment in developmental or ESL-specific courses, while one third of native English speakers complete their college degree within six years, only one in eight ELLs managed to do so too (qtd. in Bergey et al. 8). Evidently, their needs are not sufficiently met, which then limits their chances for success outside of college. Their losses reflect on both their academic and social communities, positioning instructors as instrumental for inciting change on personal, academic, social, and global levels.

The research provided suggests that as the ELL population has continued to grow, so has the achievement gap between them and language majority students. Furthermore, when ELLs do not receive instruction that effectively addresses their specific needs, and supports their specific strengths, they fall behind their NES peers. The gap that begins in their early educational careers often continues into college, into adulthood, and into society.

Reevaluating Instruction

In order to prevent further segregation at the collegiate level, instructors must reevaluate their approaches of educating their students. Part of the challenge of differentiating instruction is the sheer reality of having complex classroom configurations. Even within classes divided by achievement levels (i.e. "honors" level vs. standard level classes), educators have to consider students with learning, social, and/ or behavioral disorders; the various learning styles and degrees of multiple intelligences present in the class; and any limitations to materials or resources. English language learners can have difficulties in any of these three areas, but also deal with language barriers. To further complicate matters, not all ELLs encounter the same challenges with learning the language. As Bergey et al. point out in "Serving English Language Learners

in Higher Education: Unlocking the Potential," ELLs traditionally fall into three main categories: recent immigrants, Generation 1.5 students, and international students (4). Chao et al. contribute an interesting point, however, that most ELLs are born in the US: "More than 75 percent of ELLS in grades K-5 are second- or third-generation Americans, and 57 percent of middle and high school ELLs were born in the United States" (6). While the latter study focuses on students in primary and secondary education levels and the former study concerns college level students, the matter remains that the vast diversity within this subgroup of students requires a range of approaches in addressing their equally vast needs.

Increasingly, programs are rising up to help guide ELLs who endeavor to enter college. According to the American Institute of Research (AIR) report by Bergey et al., nearly 1,000 English as a second language (ESL) programs have partnered with universities to help students prepare for and make the transition to college (6). Although four-year universities seem to attract international students, even making up to 20 percent of the entire student population at some institutions, ELLs overall tend to favor community colleges. The lower costs of community colleges and lack of guidance through college applications may factor into this pattern, which has positioned ESL programs as "one of the fastest growing programs in many community colleges and across all types of adult education programs" (7). Increasing ELL populations across all levels of education further emphasizes the need to reevaluate the best ways to ensure their success; to ensure the success of a growing portion of a student body secures the success of the student population as a whole.

Despite the significant research on ELLs in grades K-12, little research focuses on the need to support this population at higher education institutions, as well as on their performances there (Bergey et al. 3; Chao et al. 7). The challenges facing ELLs, however, only become more complex at this higher level. Consulting the work of Snow and Biancarosa, Bergey et al. explain this increasing complexity: "…the challenge of acquiring and using a second language for academic purposes becomes greater in the later years of schooling as academic content becomes more rigorous and language becomes more precise" (3) Furthermore, Bergey and associates reference Dekeyser to point out that, now adult ELLs, these students are beyond the "critical point" for learning language implicitly, which occurs in childhood (3), meaning that they need to apply different approaches to acquire the language. As theses students advance to higher levels of education, their needs also develop, challenging instructors to meet unique, higher-level demands.

The AIR report by Bergey et al. includes multiple sections of suggestions for best practices in serving ELLs, ranging from institution-wide to instructor-specific topics. The repeated emphasis throughout the sections, though, appears in the notion of making education flexible and personally tailored to individual needs. Doing so, however, often feels too heavy of a task for most professors who already feel stretched too thin to between "adjunct-level work, a need to teach a wide variety of courses, and lack of time for professional development" (qtd. in Bergey et al. 11). Ironically, in efforts to save time and energy, professors tend to stick with traditional content and approaches but end up needing to spend more time adapting materials:

> Many teachers ultimately choose to use traditional materials because they are easily accessible or they are what has been used historically in a program; however, these materials do not take into consideration the individual needs of students (Ignatius, 2016) and require significant additional work for teachers to adapt the materials to their student populations. (Bergey et al. 12)

When teachers do not spend the extra time to adapt materials, time they legitimately may not have, they risk damaging their language minority students' chances for success.

With such constraints on time, and high stakes, instructors need assistance through training and resources. Such training could help professors see their class dynamic differently and allow them to better approach ways to strengthen both the individual and classroom community experience. For instance, ELLs benefit when their instructors understand that the key to presenting content information to ELLs is to do so in ways that reinforce language learning while prompting them to apply the knowledge to situations outside the classroom: "Integrating language, content, and critical thinking while using authentic and relevant curriculum and materials will make learning meaningful and useful for ELLs" (Bergey et al. 13). Their native English-speaking peers play a major role in their success as well: "language acquisition happens most effectively when students learn language in the context where it is used, practiced with others, and receive support for recognizing how and when to use it" (13). Community has a significant role in ELLs learning both the language and content, and also receives the effects of this populations' success.

Educators can also take a more active role in assisting students with complex materials, particularly materials that depend on language comprehension, such as reading and writing. When teachers do not take opportunities to demystify difficult texts and to explain their connections to real life situations, students are left to independently transfer

their classroom skills to new contexts (Bergey et al. 14), which opens opportunities for students to fall behind or lose interest and motivation. Especially at the university level, the popular approach to education tends to follow the assumption that students should be entirely independent; handholding has no place in institutions of higher education. Guiding a student through matters of comprehension, however, differs from walking him or her through every assignment and deadline.

Regardless of academic discipline, all instructors should be aware of their roles in being able to assist ELLs with their language acquisition as well as with developing their content knowledge. As Bergey et al. point out, "Integrating language with disciplinary content prepares students for the various types of texts and academic skills they will encounter both as part of their postsecondary education and throughout their careers" (14). Although instructors from all disciplines are able to implement into their content delivery a consciousness towards developing English language skills, composition instructors hold a unique position to do so, which will be discussed in the following section.

As these scholars have demonstrated, adapting instruction for ELLs within a mainstream classroom first requires an understanding of their unique needs and strengths. A major adjustment instructors can make includes building a bridge between the abstract and the concrete, between academic content and real-life applications. Doing so enables ELLs to engage with their academic and social communities more effectively, which benefits both of those communities overall.

Multilingual Composition Studies and Instruction

Engendering engagement in academic and social communities largely begins in

classrooms where ELLs and language majority students learn alongside and from one

another. In her study "Language and Literacy for a New Mainstream," Kerry Enright

proposes the benefits of identifying what she calls a "New Mainstream." She draws from

the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* definition of "mainstream," which denotes "a prevailing

current or direction of activity or influence" (qtd. in Enright 111), to show how this New

Mainstream challenges previous assumptions of "White, middle class, English-speaking"

students as being the norm and suggests recognition of the new norm of diverse

classrooms (111). She builds on this point to indicate the need to reevaluate instruction,

which has traditionally been developed based on the old norm and ineffectively addresses

the needs and strengths of the new norm (111). To do so, the New Mainstream classroom

would emphasize both diversity and hybridity; of the latter attribute, she notes its

importance in its ability to foster fluidity amongst communities:

> [I]t acknowledges that each individual student's experience can reflect a dynamic
> movement across and within multiple communities. Indeed, young people are
> socialized into *many* norms as they participate in various domains and
> communities; each student is likely to have a complex repertoire of language and
> literacy practices as potential resources to support academic development and
> success. (111)

The hybridity that would result from the diversity would promote stronger communities

both inside and outside the classroom, in both local and global contexts.

The idea of engaging with global communities has become increasingly important

in recent years. Not only does adapting instruction for linguistically diverse classes better

assist and prepare ELLs in their education and immersion into careers, but it also equips

native English speakers with a variety of "unique knowledges and literacies that are well suited for the cosmopolitan demands of these new times" (Enright 89). The multilingual and multicultural resources that ELLs bring into the classroom help their language-majority peers learn to engage with global communities, an essential element of today's market (Matsuda 50). As Paul Matsuda poses in "Teaching Composition in the Multilingual World: Second Language Writing in Composition Studies," educators need to face the changing reality of students' roles in society: "the question is no longer limited to how to prepare students from around the world to write like traditional students from North America; it is time to start thinking more seriously about how to prepare monolingual students to write like the rest of the world" (50). Instead of molding students to represent a piece of the world, instructors should guide students (*all* students) in how to fulfill a position within a global community.

With the goals of fostering globally engaged students within a diverse, hybridizing, New Mainstream classroom, composition programs face both unique challenges and opportunities. Matsuda acknowledges that many FYW professors, who encounter linguistically diverse classes, lack specific training to work with second language writers. He notes that some institutions attempt to address the issue by offering FYW courses specifically for ELLs, but explains that these courses are only appropriate and beneficial for students who are comfortable being designated as ELLs and working exclusively within that community (45). Allowing writing courses to count toward foreign language requirements, since they are taught at an advanced level for second language proficiency, would be one small change that could help ELLs complete their programs (46). Furthermore, he recommends that institutions make placement into

developmental or ESL courses optional, to make all FYW courses ELL friendly, to offer

professional development opportunities to assist instructors in this realm, and to design

programs with globalization efforts in mind (45). His suggestions address challenges that

affect people on all levels of an institution, from administration to professors to students.

On the part of the teacher, Matsuda acknowledges the extra strain of adapting

instruction for both native and non-native English speakers. Noting one of the major

differences in instructing these two populations, he explains:

> Their [second language writers] mental representation of second language
> 'grammar' (defined in the technical sense as the knowledge of phonology,
> morphology, syntax, and lexicon) may differ from that of first-language users.
> Addressing language issues in the writing classroom is not easy because it
> requires the teacher to have some knowledge of the structure of the English
> language and the nature of second language acquisition as well as ways of
> providing feedback on language issues. (50)

Matsuda then explains how truly challenging this feat can be for teachers, or even for

second language writing specialists, because of the lack of research, support, and

resources (50). Matsuda provides insight into the issues confronting educators, as well as

their students, and recommends identifying larger, big-picture goals that students and

professors can work toward together.

The scholars discussed agree that, until advancements are made in these areas,

composition instructors should begin by shifting their focus to globalizing their students,

embracing and exposing them to various cultures and literacies, while also working to

demystify social and linguistic constructions. By connecting them with the world around

them and making relevant connections between the content and their lives today,

instructors better prepare their students to engage with the world of tomorrow. The

research presented here demonstrates the need to address the gap existing between ELLs

and their NES peers. By evaluating the growing ELL population and subsequent achievement gap, the need to reconsider methods of instruction, and the multilingual implications for composition studies, this review seeks to thoroughly acknowledge the gap in preparation of addressing it.

Methodology & Setting

The main method of research for this study, which aims to address the issue of the academic gap between ELLs and NESs, included two surveys. The first survey targeted instructors in the FYW program at John Carroll University, while the second was designed for the institution's first and second-year students. To provide context before elucidating on the surveys themselves, JCU requires all students to take a composition course called Seminar in Academic Writing, which students typically take as first-year students but sometimes take later in their academic careers. Students place into one of two tracks: a one-semester, standard level course labeled EN 125, or a two-semester developmental writing course labeled EN 120 and EN 121 (typically taken in succession). The overarching goal of both tracks is to inform students of expectations within academic writing, regardless of their individual disciplines.

The ELL population is difficult to track at JCU because Student Accessibility Services, the office responsible for providing academic accommodations and support services, does not provide designations to ELLs. Therefore, language minority students infiltrate mainstream classrooms, both in the EN 125 and EN 120/ 121 tracks without any accommodations or needs-specific resources. Professors remain unaware of having students who identify as ELLs unless their students disclose that information, but even then professors have little support available to them for differentiating their instruction to

meet those students' needs and encourage their strengths. The school does, however, keep track of its international population, as part of its records on institutional diversity. According to "John Carroll University International Student Report," which is published by *College Factual* but recognized by JCU, about 109 international students populated the campus in 2017, of which 74 were undergraduate students. While only comprising about 3.1% of the total student body, the international population has grown 59.9% in the past five years. Furthermore, the current student body represents 25 different countries of origin ("Fast Facts: 2018-2019"). What these reports cannot verify, however, is the number of ELLs who attend the institution, as not all ELLs are immigrants or international students. For this reason, both the instructor and student surveys were designed to gather perspectives from within the mainstream composition classrooms to see how ELLs, non-ELLs, and instructors engage with one another.

In surveying students, my goal was to understand better their perspective of and experience within a FYW course, regardless of their first language identity. The scope of the survey included first and second-year students because they are the ones with most recent experiences in the EN 125 or EN 120-121 courses; while it is not uncommon for a sophomore to take the class, despite it being intended for first-year students, it is much rarer for juniors and seniors. Although the survey was completed anonymously, half of its eight questions pertained to general information, such as class year, majors, when the student took EN 125 or EN 120/121, and language status. More specifically on that last point, students were asked whether English was their first language, and to mark whether they know multiple languages. The responses allowed them to mark English as their only language, English as their primary language (but that they knew at least one other

language at a basic or higher level), that English was their second language, or that they knew multiple languages. The other half of the survey asked questions pertaining directly to experiences in writing classrooms, namely the frequency of writing, their confidence in various writing skills, comfort in various contexts, and quality of feedback from instructors. The survey was distributed electronically through an emailed link, performed through Qualtrics. In the seven days the survey was live, 231 students responded.

By surveying composition instructors, I hoped to gather an understanding of how they approach ELLs in their mainstream classrooms. Similar to the student survey, the instructor survey was eight questions, designed to be completed anonymously, and was distributed electronically through Qualtrics. The first question sought to gage how experienced the participant was with teaching EN 125/ 120/ 121, and the second question gaged how often he or she encountered students who appeared to be an ELL. Because teachers cannot ask a student what their language status is, the item also included an option of having suspected but not confirmed ELLs. Additionally, the survey included two questions in which instructors ranked challenges students have in writing, one question specifically for native English-speaking students and one for ELLs (with an option to mark non-applicable for the latter). The survey also asked how students responded to materials that incorporated other languages or cultures, if used at all. Instructors were then given an opportunity to share techniques they have found helpful in adapting instruction, materials, or evaluations to meet the needs of ELLs (again, if applicable). Another question gaged how confident they felt in teaching mainstream classes comprised of both ELLs and non-ELLs, noting if they would like to receive training in this area. Finally, instructors were able to answer one of the following: how

teaching ESL-specific courses in the past has impacted their current approaches to mainstream classes; how well they feel JCU's FYW program addresses ELLs within mainstream classrooms. Over the course of eight days, 17 responses were recorded.

I designed both surveys to gain insights into the perspectives of both instructors and students within the context of the FYW program. For more details on the surveys' structures, please see them attached to the Appendix. The student survey is labeled Appendix A and the instructor survey is labeled Appendix B.

Results of Student and Instructor Surveys

The following two subsections provide an overview of the results gathered from each survey, first looking at the student survey and then the instructor survey. After including information on the overall demographics, the student section emphasizes a comparison of results between ELLs and native English speakers.

Student Survey Results

The first two questions of the student survey targeted basic information about class year and major. To the first question, 142 of the 231 respondents marked themselves as first-year students, with 87 as second-year students, and 2 as "other" (specifications included a third-year transfer student and a College Credit Plus (CCP) student). While no significant information resulted from determining majors, it is reassuring to note that at least one person participated from each major provided on the list; the highest participating majors included psychology (14.9% or the participants), biology (11.8%), exercise science (11.4%), and communication and theater (11.4%). Of those majors, an ELL was represented at least once in each of them, except for exercise science; biology claimed four of the nine total ELLs. While the sample size of ELLs

represents a small percentage of the total student population of the survey, the respondents did offer enough information to track notable patterns, which will be demonstrated and discussed in the coming sections.

The third question on the survey asked students which year they had (or expected to) taken EN 125. The vast majority, at 75.9% of all respondents, selected "As a first year student." Only three percent selected "As a second year student," but approximately 21% (49 students) selected "other." Given the opportunity to specify their selection of the latter option, 21 students noted credits from high school (such as AP or CCP credits), 13 noted transfer credits, 11 noted having taken the Honors Program alternative course, three noted taking EN 120/121, and one student's comment explained not understanding the question but noted that he or she was majoring in the bilingual program of business administration. This last student identified as an ELL, which may account for the misunderstanding of the question. According to the report on just ELL respondents, two-thirds of the sample took EN 125 as a first-year student, while the other third noted they had AP, transferable credits, or did not understand the question (as stated above). None of the ELLs expected to take the FYW course beyond their first year, nor had any marked that they were enrolled in either the Honors Program alternative course or EN 120/121.

When asked about how much instructors from courses that most influenced their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills emphasized writing, during and outside of class time, the consensus revealed most students identified having written often and overall significant amounts (52.7% of NES, 55.6% of ELLs). Nearly a fifth of the NES respondents found writing occasionally, in large and small amounts, to be most influential, with the exact percentage being a few points higher for ELLs (20.4% vs.

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22.2%). The next highest response for the surveyed majority indicated influence through having written often, though in small amounts (14.2%), but ELLs did not agree. When looked at individually, none of the ELLs selected this option, and instead selected having to write for only a few major assignments (22.2%), tying in rank with the previous characteristic. Only about a tenth of language-majority students found writing only for a few major assignments as being the most influential in developing the stated skills (11.3%), and a handful of students (2.2%) selected "other" (mostly specifying no impact), which no ELL elected.

Another question that showed a difference between ELL respondents and native English speakers was one that asked students to rank their confidence in applying various writing skills, specifically when writing in English. Those skills included grammar and mechanics, vocabulary, command of voice and style, and accurate response to a prompt, as well as the option to write in an "other" option. Students were able to rank each skill on a scale of one to five, where one signified "not confident;" two, "slightly confident;" three, "moderately confident;" four, "fairly confident;" and five, "very confident." In an effort to determine any patterns or major differences, the survey results were divided into two reports (in addition to the report on all student results): English language learners and native English speakers.

Across these reports, the two student populations tended to disagree. Although NESs included "very confident" responses in each skill, ELLs reported higher levels of confidence in almost every category, even at their lowest rankings. For example, the lowest an ELL ranked vocabulary was a four, whereas NESs reported a two. Similarly, command of voice and style ELLs reported a low of three, which native English speakers

ranked as a one. The lowest categories selected by ELLs as their most confident skills included accurate response to a prompt and grammar and mechanics, which they gave both a two-level rank; NESs reported a one in these categories. While native English speakers did give "other" various ranks (ELLs did not), they did not specify other skills they may have had in mind. In terms of the numbers of students who provided each rank, see Figure 1 and Figure 2 below. These figures present a narrower range of concerns from ELLs, though ELLs show a more consistent concern with grammar and mechanics than native speakers. Additionally, the majority of ELLs display a level-four confidence in most of these skills; their NES peers also mostly selected this level, but with less disparity from those who ranked a level-five confidence.

Figure 1: Writing Skills - Native English Speakers
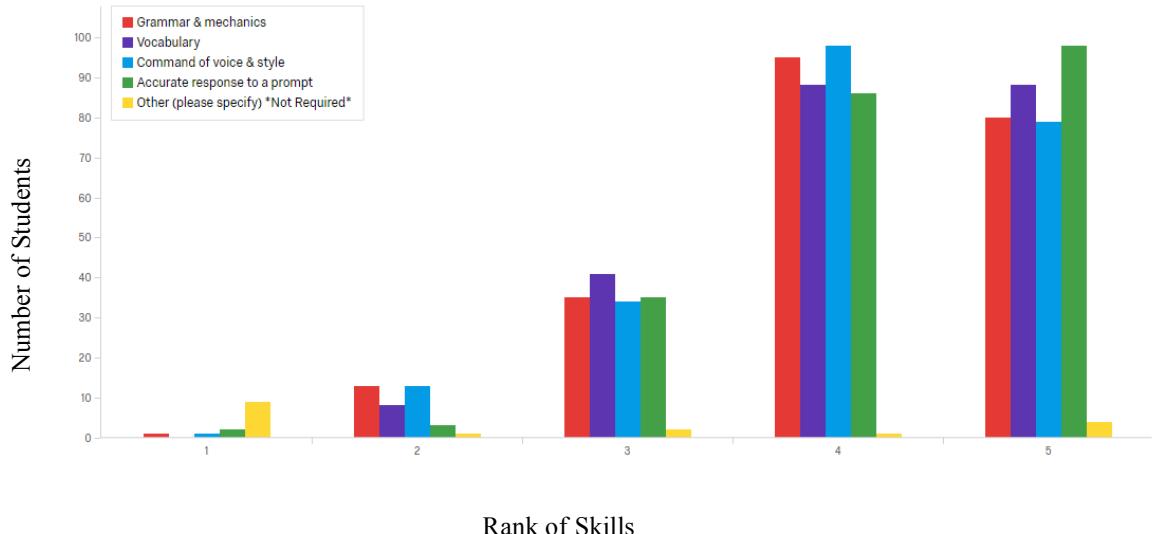
Figure 2: Writing Skills – English Language Learners
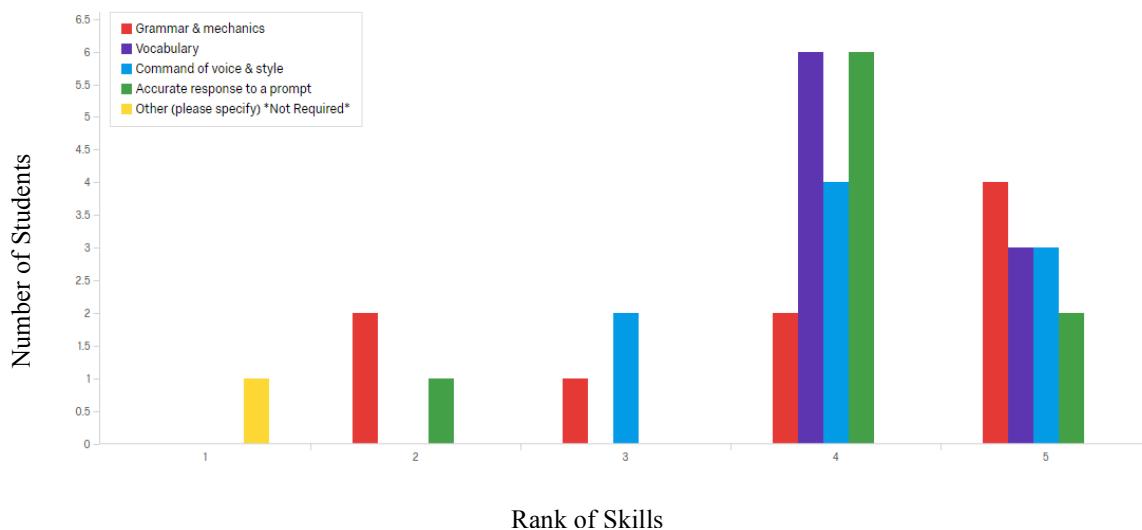
Further probing students' sense of confidence, the survey asked students to determine their confidence in speaking and writing for class, in both formal and informal contexts. Given the options between feeling more confident in speaking than writing, vice versa, or equally confident, the ELL population responded with a stark contrast to their native English-speaking peers: the nine ELLs divided equally among the three options, but the non-ELLs felt nearly twice as confident in writing than in speaking (23.8% were more confident in speaking, 45.5% were more confident in writing, and 26% were equally confident). Both groups had more students select confidence in informal texts than they had of students who selected being confident in formal texts, with the difference among ELLs being 66.7% informal and 44.4% formal, and 43.3% informal and 26.8% formal among native English speakers. Because students were allowed to select all that apply, the reality that the percentages for the latter group do not total to 100% indicates that nearly a third of those students did not participate in this part of the inquiry.

Another area of difference in responses arises from a question concerning feedback students receive from their instructors. More specifically, when asked, "Do you feel instructors in your English courses provide(d) feedback on your writing that affirms your strengths and addresses areas for improvement," the majority of both ELLs and native English speakers agreed that their instructors usually or always provided balanced feedback. The difference between the groups, however, arises between the next most common answer: exactly one third of ELLs felt instructors focus on strengths over weaknesses, while almost a third of non-ELLs felt they focused on weaknesses over strengths. Around or just under a tenth of each population agreed that they received inconsistent feedback, with a few language majority students reporting having received no feedback concerning either area.

The differences and patterns that arise from the data provide insights into the imbalanced academic experiences between native English speakers and English language learners. This imbalance in experiences and confidence levels demonstrates the gap that exits between the two groups.

Instructor Survey Results

The instructors included in the survey were/ are all current employees participating in JCU's FYW program. Of the seventeen instructors who responded, approximately two thirds of them have taught either EN 125 or EN 120/121 multiple times; the remaining third have only taught once, the majority of whom are currently teaching the course for the first time. When asked how many semesters they have encountered ELLs, three professors revealed they had never, which tied in popularity with having one semester with these students. Four of them (23.5%) answered with two

or three semesters, and the majority (7 instructors, or 41.2%) noted they had encountered ELLs more than three semesters. No one selected the option of having suspected but not confirmed ELLs in their classrooms. Having established a context for these professors' backgrounds allows for greater insight into their responses about their classroom experiences specifically within mainstream composition classrooms.

In contrast to asking the students which skills they feel most confident in applying to their writing, instructors were asked which of those same skills they see students struggling with the most. Instructors were given an opportunity to rank these skills on a scale of one to five (one being the most challenging) for native English speakers and for ELLs, separately. In regards to their results on the former, accurately responding to a prompt tied with command of voice and style for the number one challenge, both remaining the second most challenging, though the prompt response had nearly double the concerns. Interestingly, the third most popular response for the number one challenge was "other," which instructors specified as "understanding the concept of 'entering a conversation,' " "global issues like organization, use/ citation of evidence, and paragraph development," and "thesis and structure." Grammar and mechanics, registered as one item, was overwhelmingly marked as the third most difficult skill for these students to apply, as was vocabulary as a fourth and fifth concern. Grammar and vocabulary was never the least concerning, nor was command of voice and style.

The responses instructors gave in regards toward challenges they witness among their ELL students, showed both similarities and differences from the responses just previously reviewed. Grammar and mechanics was the number one concern, with command of voice and style closely behind it. The third most popular response for the top

challenge yet again was "other," which included skills of analysis and addressing audience and purpose. Command of voice and style and accurately responding to a prompt tied for the second most challenging skill for ELLs, but they also tied as the most common responses ranked fourth; in both the second and fourth rank, both skills were ranked as such by nearly a third of the respondents. Grammar and then vocabulary followed as a close second and third place in the level-two concern, and nearly two thirds of the instructors marked vocabulary as a middle level concern.

The survey also sought to gather information on the ways in which teachers design their instruction for mainstream composition classes. When asked if they have incorporated texts that include other languages or diverse cultural references, nearly half of the instructors answered positively, noting that their students had engaged well with the texts. About a third said they had used them but that student responses were generally neutral, and a fifth of them said they had not used these kinds of texts; none of the respondents selected that they had used them but the students had not engaged well. When asked to describe any helpful techniques for adapting instruction, lesson materials, or evaluations to meet the needs of their ELLs, most of the feedback included techniques that can assist all students without singling out any particular groups or individual students. More details from their suggestions will be included in the discussion portion of this report, but general points included creating a welcoming atmosphere that encourages students to ask questions, providing concrete examples that can be explained without excluding or embarrassing any groups, meeting with students outside of class for more personalized explanations and guidance, and addressing both cultural and academic norms at the beginning of the semester.

When asked whether they previously had taught ESL-specific courses, forty percent of the surveyed instructors had taught ESL-specific courses previously; they then gave feedback on how those experiences have impacted their approaches to teaching mainstream classes. While one person reported not seeing any significant impact, most of the others said that it made them more student-centered, more sensitive to ways that promote participation among the class as a whole, more concerned about global skills than local skills (e.g. organization over grammar), and more understanding of the need to adapt as an instructor.

The other sixty percent who had not previously taught an ESL-specific course provided feedback on how well they feel JCU addresses the needs of ELLs within mainstream classes. While the majority of instructors felt the program was sufficient in accordance with its academic standards, particularly in the benefit of having small class sizes that allow professors to give more attention where needed, most noted that they feel instructors could use more professional development in the best ways to approach this population and its needs. Others felt the program overall does not have enough funds or resources to sufficiently support these students, and that its instructors vary greatly in their preparedness to teach this population. These pieces of feedback align with their responses to the question of feeling well-equipped to teach mainstream classes of both native English speakers and ELLs: the majority (40%) felt equipped but wanted more training, 26.7% felt confident in their knowledge and skills, 20% felt ill-equipped and wanted more training, and 13.3% felt they could manage if necessary. None of the respondents felt ill-equipped while not intending to need more training.

Overall, the instructor survey responses tell a great deal about their diverse levels of training and of working with ELLs. The imbalance present among instructors contributes to the achievement gap among the ELL and NES students, which reflects in the popular desire for guidance and adjustments.

Discussion & Recommendations

The following section divides discussion based on the two major groups surveyed: students and instructors. The student section connects the student survey results with some of the main points presented in the literature previously reviewed. The instructor section has a similar aim, which leads up to a subsection of their recommendations that other instructors may find useful in adapting their approach to New Mainstream composition classrooms.

Discussion of Student Results

Both NES and ELL populations agreed that writing often and overall significant amounts proves the most helpful in developing their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, or at least requiring a balance of both large and small writing assignments. This agreement may reinforce the Bergey et al. finding that ELLs benefit from relevant assignments that can be applied to their daily lives, as well as from explanations about how the materials connect to the outside world (13). When students have to write frequently in various amounts and contexts, they are able to practice a wider variety of skills, enter into more meaningful discussions, and feel encouraged in the value of their education. The stark difference between the two student populations in their preferences for writing often in small amounts or having to write for a few major assignments aligns with Bergey and associates' explanation that ELLs tend to need more time to work

through an assignment, especially when having to do so independently (14), which larger assignments would allow them to do but smaller, frequent assignments would not. This reality makes understandable the response from ELLs that they prefer informal contexts to speak and write, allowing them lower stakes to practice their foreign language.

Perhaps for similar reasons, ELLs reported accurate response to a prompt and grammar and mechanics as their two least confident skills. Granted, the majority of them marked themselves as fairly and very confident in these areas, but these skills were also the only two ranked as slightly confident. This range of response may depend on individual student's prior education in English, and reinforces the point by Bergey et al. that many college-level ELLs have missed the prime window for implicit learning of the language (3). One benefit from having missed that window, however, may be that these students have to look up words and dig deeper into the language, which would account for their strong confidence levels in vocabulary. NESs, conversely, had lower confidence levels across all skills, perhaps suggesting that they take for granted their command of the language. This possibility would also explain why ELLs felt equally confident in speaking and writing in class, while their peers felt significantly more confident in writing: writing allows native English speakers to think about their writing and make more conscious efforts to use academic language, to disengage from the relaxed vernacular they would be more likely to employ when speaking; ELLs are likely more naturally aware of the language that they are using, regardless of whether they are speaking or writing.

The difference that arises between the two groups' responses on the feedback they receive from their English instructors proves more difficult to explain. The majority of

both groups agreed that they received balanced feedback that addressed both strengths and areas for improvement. The groups disagree, however, in their second most popular response: ELLs responded that their instructors focused on strengths more than weaknesses, while language majority students felt they focused more on weaknesses than strengths. One potential cause could be an equally sizable gap between educators' training in approaching ELLs. If not properly trained, or if feeling ill-equipped in best practices, instructors may be more likely to overcompensate with positive feedback. The response each group receives from their instructors aligns with their confidence levels as well: if ELLs receive more feedback on their strengths, they may feel more confident in their ability to apply skills; if NES students receive more feedback on areas they need to improve, they may feel less confident in their abilities. More training in addressing the needs and strengths of ELLs may also assist in more balanced feedback across student populations.

Discussion of Instructor Results

A large majority of the instructors who participated in the survey have encountered ELLs in their composition courses, an occurrence which is likely to only grow in the coming years, according to the growth in the last five years of international students alone (as discussed previously). In their experiences so far, the NES population tends to struggle the most with accurately responding to a prompt and demonstrating command of voice and style. The latter is also a main concern with ELLs, along with employing proper grammar and mechanics, and responding accurately to a prompt was equally concerning as the second most challenging skill to apply. These results suggest that both language majority students and ELLs often struggle with higher order skills

such as interpretation and appropriate responses, but that ELLs have the added challenge of articulating their thoughts according to the rules of the language. Their difficulty in generating grammatically and mechanically correct output does not necessarily reflect a difficulty in understanding the task or ability to perform it, as Matsuda would point out (50), but it does demonstrate their need for reinforced guidance in English.

These concerns in mind, the responses the instructors gave on the ways they adapt their instruction become more interesting. Multiple instructors noted the need to be flexible and to adapt even from class to class, not just between ELLs and NES students, which aligns with the point Bergey et al. make about ELLs having diverse individual needs (4, 12). In general, however, professors' responses included personal assistance outside of class, fostering an environment that encourages all students to ask questions and participate in discussions, allowing students to work in small groups, and providing examples of weak and strong submissions received in the past for specific assignments, walking through thorough explanations between the two and establishing clear expectations. All of these suggestions have the potential to improve the concerns that both group share, as well as to address the added challenge of grammar and mechanics that ELLs face, but in ways that do not single them out from the rest of their peers.

The ways these instructors adapt their instruction ultimately affect the academic and social climate of the classroom. Both elements are important when establishing a strong, New Mainstream classroom, as Enright emphasizes in "Language and Literacy for a New Mainstream." One way that instructors can encourage growth in these areas comes through including texts that reference other languages and cultures. Not only did the majority of the surveyed instructors mark that they had used these types of texts and

saw their students positively engage with them, but one of the participants, in response to the request for helpful methods of adapting lessons and materials, offered the following advise that could help other instructors when choosing diverse texts: "[M]y approach to teaching these students in a mixed classroom often involves making sure that cultural references are either given adequate context (in a way that does not single out ELL students) or are equally unfamiliar to both international and domestic students." Selecting texts that may be unfamiliar to all audiences can allow for more open discussions and more specific explanations, while promoting empathy between the two groups of students. Okhremtchouk et al. and Bergey et al. are correct in saying that students miss out on learning from their peers when ELLs are not properly addressed (7; 13), which disrupts the overall learning potential of the academic community.

Despite the efforts made by these faculty members, many of them still expressed a desire for training in best practices of ELL and New Mainstream classroom instruction. Those who have received previous training largely testify to its benefits, such as making them more aware of all students' needs, better prepared to know ways to engage all students, and more open to adapting their approaches to instruction.

Instructor Recommendations

Amidst the feedback the professors contributed through their survey responses lies many pieces of recommendations that other instructors can adopt. Although analyzed at length in the previous discussion section, the importance of their suggestions warrant a brief, consolidated review here.

One of the first steps for instructors when reassessing their approaches to their mainstream classes starts with cultivating a flexible attitude that looks for ways to adapt

to diverse and changing needs of individuals and whole classes. That perspective adjustment may then lead into other beneficial practices, such recognizing the need for and offering personal assistance, an environment that encourages open discussion, low-stakes and collaborative learning opportunities, and multiple examples that demonstrate expectations. Additionally, instructors should provide in-depth explanations that help students to connect their subject's content to their everyday lives. When giving these explanations, however, teachers must not single out ELLs from the rest of the class. Instead, they should explain the materials in ways that can clarify matters for all students. One way to ensure this circumstance involves incorporating texts that may be unfamiliar to everyone. Doing so not only prevents situations where one group either gets left behind in understanding the material or get embarrassed by seemingly simple explanations, but it also instigates positive opportunities for open discourse and community building. Making conscious efforts to distribute balanced feedback to every student has the potential of raising student confidence levels among all students, which could foster a more engaging atmosphere in the classroom.

The suggestions provided by JCU's composition instructors demonstrate transferable qualities that allow instructors in other disciplines to repurpose the strategies when encountering diverse, New Mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, in practice, these strategies benefit both ELLs and NESs, encouraging a stronger classroom community and a more engaging learning environment.

Conclusion

The gap that exists in research for successfully teaching New Mainstream classrooms composed of native English speakers and English language learners has

become a significant issue because it means that students are often denied access to their fullest academic and social potentials. The research conducted and reviewed in this essay demonstrate the differing strengths and needs of both NES and ELL populations, as well as the inconsistency in teacher-preparedness that ultimately contributes to the lack students experience. Although this investigation into the gaps in research, instruction, and student successes achieves the goal of highlighting opportunities for improvements in New Mainstream college classes, further research in these areas could help justify more resources for the growing ELL population. If educators receive the training they desire, not only will they be better able to approach instructing the ELLs in their classroom, but they will also be able to provide a better education for all of their students. Progress starts with awareness and efforts to adjust. With a united effort to do so, it will become easier to effectively "teach the students in front of you."

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English Classroom Experiences - Student Survey

Q1 Is this your first or second year of college?

◯ First year (1)

◯ Second year (2)

◯ Other (please specify) (6)

_____

- -

Q2 Please select the academic department(s) through which you are majoring. You may select multiple if you have multiple majors.

☐ Art History & Humanities (1)

☐ Biology (2)

☐ Chemistry (3)

☐ Classical & Modern Languages & Culture (4)

☐ Communication & Theater (5)

☐ Counseling (6)

☐ Education & School Psychology (7)

☐ English (8)

☐ Exercise Science (9)

☐ History (10)

☐ Mathematics & Computer Science (11)

☐ Military Science (12)

☐ Philosophy (13)

☐ Physics (14)

☐ Political Science (15)

☐ Psychology (16)

☐ Sociology & Criminology (17)

☐ Theology & Religious Studies (18)

Q3 When did/ will you take EN 125? Please select all that apply.

☐ As a first year student (1)

☐ As a second year student (2)

☐ As a third year student (3)

☐ As a fourth year student (4)

☐ Other (please specify. Examples: EN 112, transfer credit, etc.) (5)

_____

Q4 In the courses that have most influenced your ability to read, write, and think critically, how much did/do your instructors emphasize writing?

Consider "writing" to include all writing, done during class time and done outside of class for an assignment.

○ We wrote often and an overall significant amount (1)

○ We wrote often, but mostly in small amounts (3)

○ We wrote occasionally, in large and small amounts (4)

○ We only wrote for a few major assignments (5)

○ Other (please specify) (6)

_____

Q5 Is English your first language? Additionally, please specify if you know multiple languages

○ Yes - I only speak English (1)

○ Yes - but I know at least one other language (at a basic or higher level) (2)

○ No - English is my second language (3)

○ No - I know more than two languages (4)

- -

Q6 How confident are you in applying the following skills when writing (in English)? Please slide each dial according to the following scale:

1 = not confident
2 = slightly confident
3 = moderately confident
4 = fairly confident

5 = very confident

NOTE: Your response automatically rounds to the nearest whole number, regardless of where you leave your sliding marker. Please mark accordingly.

	1	2	3	4	5
Grammar & mechanics ()			▮		
Vocabulary ()			▮		
Command of voice & style ()			▮		
Accurate response to a prompt ()			▮		
Other (please specify) *Not Required* ()			▮		

- -
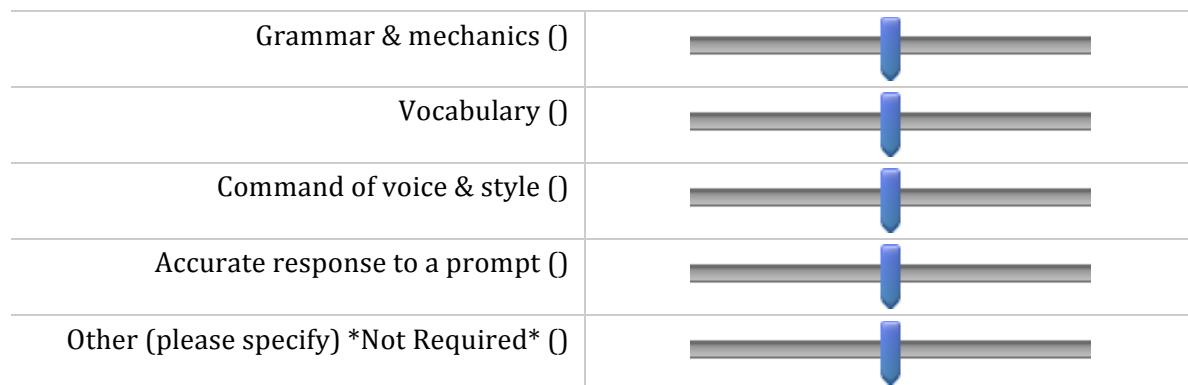
Q7 How confident do you feel when speaking or writing for class, and in what contexts? Select all that apply.

☐ I am more confident speaking than writing (1)

☐ I am more confident writing than speaking (2)

☐ I am equally confident in both speaking and writing (7)

☐ I am confident in **<u>informal</u>** contexts (3)

☐ I am confident in **<u>formal</u>** contexts (4)

☐ Other (please specify) (5)

_____

- -

Q8 Do you feel instructors in your English courses provide(d) feedback on your writing that affirms your strengths and addresses areas for improvement?

○ Usually or always - focuses on strengths over weaknesses (1)

○ Usually or always - focuses on weaknesses over strengths (2)

○ Usually or always - balances feedback between strengths and weaknesses (3)

○ Provides inconsistent feedback (4)

○ Does not provide feedback in either regard (5)

English Classroom Experiences - Instructor Survey

Q1 Have you taught EN 125 (or EN 120/121)?

○ I have taught the course previously (multiple times), but currently I do not (1)

○ I taught the class once before, but I have not taught it since (4)

○ This is my first semester teaching the course (2)

Q2 In your English courses, how many semesters have you encountered students whose first language was not English?

○ None (1)

○ Just once (2)

○ Two or three semesters (3)

○ More than three semesters (4)

○ I've suspected students in at least one class, but have never been able to confirm with them (5)

Q3 Please rank the challenges you see natively English-speaking students facing in their writing, where the number one challenge being at the top and the least common challenge at the bottom.
_____ Grammar & mechanics (1)
_____ Vocabulary (2)
_____ Command of voice & style (3)
_____ Accurately responding to a prompt (4)
_____ Other (please specify, if applicable) (5)

Q4 Please rank the challenges you see English language learners (ELL's) facing in their writing, where the number one challenge being at the top and the least common challenge

at the bottom. If you have not encountered ELL's in your classroom, please note "N/A" in the "Other" text box.

_____ Grammar & mechanics (1)
_____ Vocabulary (2)
_____ Command of voice & style (3)
_____ Accurately responding to a prompt (4)
_____ Other (please specify, if applicable) (5)

Q5 Regardless of whether or not you have had ELL's in your classes, do you incorporate texts that include other languages or diverse cultural references? Please consider how well your classes have, overall, received these texts, if used.

○ I have used them - the students engaged well (1)

○ I have used them - student responses were generally neutral (2)

○ I have used them - the students did not engage well with them (3)

○ I do not use these kinds of texts (4)

Q6 Please describe any techniques you have found helpful in adapting instruction, lesson materials, or evaluations to ELL's needs in your classroom.

○ Not applicable (1)

○ If applicable, type your response here: (2)

_____

Q7 Do you feel well-equipped to teach a class mixed with native and non-native English speaking students?

○ Yes - I feel confident in my knowledge & skills (1)

○ Yes - but I would like more information/ training (2)

○ I can manage if I have to (3)

○ No - I do not intend to need training (4)

○ No - but I would like more information/ training (5)

- -

Q8 Have you ever taught an ESL-specific course, whether at JCU or elsewhere? Please select A (YES) or B (NO) and answer accordingly by completing the provided text box.

○ A (YES): How has the experience impacted your approach to teaching mainstream classes? (1) _____

○ B (NO): Not having this experience, how well do you feel the program overall addresses the needs of English language learners within the context of the mixed classrooms? (2) _____