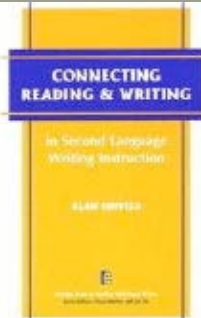


***Connecting Speaking & Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction***

<b>Author:</b>	Robert Weissberg (2006)		
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*Connecting Speaking & Writing in Second Language Writing Instruction* (henceforth *CS&W*) is a useful book which should be of interest to its entire intended audience: foreign language or ESL teachers, composition teachers, teachers-in-training, and teacher educators/researchers. Divided into seven chapters, each with clearly organized subsections, the book remains faithful throughout to its aim of demonstrating how structured speaking practice benefits language learners in the ESL writing classroom. Each chapter begins with an epigraph taken from the work of a scholar in one of the fields brought into discussion, and ends with a set of suggested tasks and/or discussion questions. It is a well-referenced book that includes numerous diagrams and examples.

In "An Introduction to Dialogue and Second Language Writing," Weissberg initiates the reader into his central argument: second language writing is best acquired through a dialogic classroom model. A key assumption is that "social interaction provides an ideal context for mastering complex cognitive skills like writing" (p. 3). Also summarized here are the remaining chapters, which include both the theoretical justification for this argument and specific techniques for incorporating spoken interaction into the L2 writing classroom.

In Chapter 2, "From Talking to Writing," Weissberg lays out developmental and sociocultural theories as well as evidence from empirical studies as foundations for his claim that social interaction should be a basic part of the L2 writing classroom. Of particular interest is Vygotsky's thesis that writing, like all higher cognitive functions, emerges from the inner speech that children acquire through social interaction. Vygotsky's ideas have prompted writing teachers "to focus on

collaborative learning as one way to promote the speaking-thinking-writing connection for student learners" (p. 16).

In "ESL Writers and Speakers: A World of Individual Differences" (Ch. 3), Weissberg uses case studies to look at differences among L2 learners according to modality preference: Do learners find it easier to approach L2 through speaking, writing, or a balance of the two? He points out that assuming a natural progression from speech to writing--as Vygotsky did--doesn't always hold up for L2 learners. Weissberg also explains how oral and written tasks can be balanced in the L2 writing class so students have opportunities to use their stronger modality to develop their weaker one.

The heart of *CS&W* is Chapter 4, "Beyond Teacher-Talk: Instructional Conversations in the Writing Classroom." After reviewing the limitations of transmission-style teaching as exemplified by the IRE sequence (teacher Initiates a question, student Responds, teacher provides an Evaluative comment), Weissberg presents Instructional Conversations (ICs) in considerable detail; these are instructionally-focused but natural-sounding teacher-student dialogues intended as the main tools for embedding instruction within social interaction in the L2 writing classroom. Teachers can build ICs by offering various forms of verbal assistance in the classroom: turn-taking, allowing wait-time, modeling, feeding-back, questions, and uptake; they can also prepare for the IC classroom experience by developing a content-based curriculum, good materials, and collaborative projects. The basis for promoting ICs is threefold: (1) Speech is developmentally related to writing, so L2 writers draw on the linguistic resources of their conversational talk. 2) Students who talk about their writing tend to write with greater coherence. 3) When writing is taught conversationally, it becomes a meaningful, reality-linked social activity.

Chapter 5, "Conversations in the Writing Tutorial" (with Gina L. Hochhalter), is about using the dialogic approach during tutoring and conferencing. In focus are four strategies for building oral scaffolding: get the student talking (for example, through positive feedback), maintain conversational parity (as through turn-taking), ask leading questions (dealing with sentence-level problems, global discourse, etc.), and "link and extend" through verbal linkages (which, for example, echo the student's own talk) and idea linkages (which incorporate the student's ideas into the instructional dialogue, as when teachers summarize or paraphrase them).

In "Written Response as Dialogue" (Ch. 6), the main focus is on how teachers can approach comments on student drafts, since these are likely to be the most frequent form of written interaction L2 writing teachers have with their students. Weissberg contends that the dialogic quality of a teacher's written comments depends on such factors as degree of personal involvement (for example, including a student's name), topic continuity (for example, mentioning previous work or remarks by the student), where on a paper comments appear (end comments resemble listening without interruption), degree of student participation (that is, the extent to which students have opportunities to "talk back"), and the student's intention in writing paper (a teacher may be biased if s/he compares the student's work to an ideal template). Also of note is the teacher's social stance, as formed by the attitudes s/he projects and the recognition that each written comment is a speech act, and as such is necessarily communicative. The more dialogic the comments, the better for the students' ability to develop their own writing.

In the final chapter, "Critiquing the Dialogue Approach," Weissberg raises potential objections to the dialogic model and provides responses. Topics include how the dialogic model differs from the Socratic dialogue (the former involves less control and more conversational collaboration with students), using oral language to develop writing when speech is not a student's strength (including speech provides students with an additional option as they develop their own voices as writers), the value of peer response groups (students develop a sense of audience), and taking responsibility for the personal issues that may surface when the dialogue approach is adopted. Weissberg concludes *CS&W* by noting that writing instruction, like writing itself, is a social activity.

Identifying the shortcomings of *CS&W* has been a challenge. Weissberg does an admirable job of keeping the material accessible to a wide variety of readers. Nevertheless, in an effort to reach a range of instructional personnel, the suggested assignments sometimes seem too widely targeted: some are aimed at novice teachers or teachers-in-training, while others are aimed at veteran teachers or scholars; the effect is one of mildly inconsistent register.

Another issue is acknowledged by Weissberg himself (p. 144): In some situations, the dialogue approach may simply not work or be appropriate, for example if students are unable or refuse to participate. This point needs greater emphasis. Convincing students that the "noisy classroom" is a place of structured learning may prove problematic. Even if a teacher explains the purpose of classroom conversation at the start of the term, the point may need regular repetition. Teachers may also struggle to control the "instructional" part of ICs during peer group discussions in big classes, especially when some groups work faster or more diligently than others, or when students who share a first language unavoidably work together.

A third concern is that, while Weissberg does mention that to follow all of his suggestions may be impractical, not enough attention is given to this issue. The proposed approach to written comments, for example, may prove unrealistic for teachers, who are often responsible for several large classes at a given time. And while veteran teachers may be well-equipped to measure Weissberg's suggestions against the realm of practical reality, new teachers and teachers-in-training may find that a sincere attempt to fulfill the promises and possibilities of the dialogic approach is a daunting task. They might become discouraged upon discovering that time simply doesn't allow for the ideal level of engagement with every student's writing.

Finally, although there are both subject and author indices, a glossary of terms and acronyms would have been helpful, as many terms are introduced in the course of the book.

Instructional Conversations are guided dialogues with a pedagogical purpose. The takeaway message of *CS&W* is that constructing ICs means giving up control of predictable outcomes and making room for students to become less like empty vessels into which teachers pour unquestionable knowledge and more like partners in a journey of discovery. It's a valuable message, and well said.

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