

Generation 1.5

In the fall of 1995, the Literacy Committee at San Francisco State University (SFSU) conducted a periodic review of students' compliance with undergraduate written English requirements. At that time, we, the editors of this *CATESOL Journal* theme section, formed a subcommittee to focus specifically on students who spoke English as a second language because we believed that these students had instructional needs that were distinct from those of native English-speaking students.

During our 9-month study, it became clear to us that traditional institutional labels, categories, and dichotomies (e.g., native speaker vs. ESL speaker; "remedial" vs. mainstream; academically underprepared vs. prepared; "basic writer" vs. skilled writer) did not capture the full complexity of our ESL student population. One group of students in particular seemed to be overlooked: those immigrants who arrived in the U.S. at a young age, learned English primarily through informal means, received most or all of their education in the U.S., and entered college with language and literacy profiles somewhere between those of "basic writer" and "ESL student."

Since the summer of 1996, we have been gathering data on this student population. We, along with a small but growing body of researchers, now refer to these students as "Generation 1.5," in acknowledgment that these students have language backgrounds and educational needs somewhere between those of recently arrived *first generation* immigrants and U.S.-born *second generation* immigrants. These Generation 1.5 students often have language characteristics that mark them as second language writers—characteristics that all too often are inappropriately subsumed in composition research and literature under the label of "academic underpreparation."

The sample student text which follows illustrates typical language characteristics of Generation 1.5 students. The author, Jessica, is writing a review of a restaurant as an initial assignment for her basic writing class. The simplicity in sentence structure and presentation of ideas, as well as problems with logical connectors and basic grammar errors mark this writer as underprepared for college-level writing.

All You Can Eat

Oriental restaurants very everywhere around the Bay area; however, not many of them serve two different cuisine at the same time. Many restaurants serve the kinds of food they are better with and usually the foods are from their own cultural dishes. For example, restaurant might serve only Vietnamese foods because it is opened by Vietnamese, so they won't have Chinese dishes. Anyway, not all restaurants serve only one particular cuisine. Like the one I visit, they serve both Chinese and Japanese foods. China Harbour is the name, and it is a great place to visit for those who want to get a taste of both Chinese and Japanese foods at the same time and pay at a descent price.

I visit the one in San Mateo and it is about 45 minutes ride from San Francisco. There is a large parking lot for people to park their cars, so they won't have to circle around the block for space. Last time I visited China Harbour was on Saturday around 8:00 p.m. There were six seated tables, three tables Chinese, two tables Caucasians and one table Philippinos on one side of the room and the other side was empty. All the people were having buffet instead of ordering from the regular menu because buffet has made the restaurant famous for it's name. It attracts people from different cultures.

It is clear that this text was written by a non-native speaker, and arguably, Jessica needs second language instruction that basic writing courses may not be able to provide. Yet we find Jessica, and students like her in basic writing classes rather than ESL, often with teachers who feel unprepared to appropriately address the language needs of these students. However, it would be inappropriate to place Jessica in a typical college ESL course, for she is by no means a linguistic and cultural "newcomer" to the U.S.; she displays a degree of oral fluency and identification with U.S. culture that would make her clearly "out of place" in an ESL course.

In order to raise awareness about the Generation 1.5 population within the fields of TESOL, college Composition, and K-12 Language Arts instruction, we began a series of conference presentations and workshops at various institutions. The response from teachers—both mainstream and ESL—has been very powerful. When we have presented examples of Generation 1.5 student writing and discussed these students' language and literacy characteristics, the typical reaction of teachers has been something akin to, "I recognize these students! They are the ones in my English class who are struggling the most and whom I feel the least able to help."

In an effort to help teachers work effectively with these students, we have assembled a collection of articles by and for teachers and researchers who have taken an interest in Generation 1.5. These articles represent a variety of instructional contexts. Some focus on specific pedagogical approaches, while others focus more on general principles for working with these students. Some focus on teaching, while other focus more on student characteristics. Some focus on university settings, while others focus on non-university settings. However, all the articles assembled here share a common

concern: helping teachers serve this hitherto underserved student population. We hope you will find the articles to be good starting point for your own discussions about Generation 1.5 issues.

Guest Editors

Sugie Goen is an Assistant Professor of English and Co-Coordinator of Composition at San Francisco State University. She teaches basic writing courses as well as graduate courses on basic writing pedagogy and composition theory and research methods. In addition to her work with Generation 1.5 learners and their teachers, she currently co-directs a FIPSE-funded Accelerated English program which addresses the needs of SFSU students most at risk for retention and attainment of a college degree.

Deborah Swanson is a Professor of English, Co-Coordinator of Composition, and Coordinator of Graduation Writing Assessment at San Francisco State University. She teaches graduate courses in theory, research methods, and pedagogy as well as undergraduate writing courses. Dr. Swanson has published on writing across the disciplines, on policy studies of teacher satisfaction, on the research technique called intervention protocols, and on the ways teachers shape students' views of argument rhetoric.

Patricia Porter is Professor of English at San Francisco State University, teaching pedagogical grammar, methodology for listening and speaking, curriculum and assessment, student teaching, and the integrative seminar in the MATESOL Program. For 18 years, she served as the Coordinator of the ESL Program for nonnative speakers and taught ESL classes in oral communication and grammar. She is currently working on a grammar-for-writing textbook and has served as CATESOL secretary as well as co-chair of regional and state conferences.

*Deborah vanDommelen is Director of the San Francisco State University Learning Assistance Center (LAC), where she mentors MA/TESOL students who teach in the LAC Grammar-for-Writing Workshops, an academic support program specifically designed for Generation 1.5 learners from both ESL and Composition classes. She is a co-author of *Inside Out/Outside In*, a literature text for second language writers.*

