Curricula for ESL writing instruction: Options in the AMEP and internationally

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ABSTRACT
This article discusses four issues central to instructors’ conceptualisations of curricula for ESL writing instruction, citing findings from interviews with 48 highly skilled instructors of ESL writing in settlement and university programs in countries where English is the dominant language (Australia, Canada, New Zealand) or where English is an international language (Hong Kong, Japan, and Thailand). Focusing on curriculum options in the AMEP, I show how the program in Australia has taken comparatively unique approaches to ESL writing curricula in terms of: (1) theoretical foundations, (2) the integration of curriculum components, (3) the specificity or generality of curriculum purposes, and (4) variability in assessment.

Introduction
Every educational circumstance necessarily provides people with certain opportunities for learning, focuses on certain content or subject matter, organises and sequences teaching in particular ways, utilises specific resources, and interacts with relevant social contexts. For language education, these fundamental aspects of curriculum are typically addressed through a range of options related to the nature of language, learning, teaching, and social policies and contexts (Stern 1983; Stern, Allen and Harley 1992). In the present article I review the ways in which certain people in the AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) in Australia have addressed some of these curriculum options, specifically for the teaching of writing in ESL (English as a Second Language). The data informing this review are interviews that I conducted in 1999 with 48 highly experienced instructors of ESL writing about their teaching practices. The instructors worked in countries where English is either the dominant language (Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, cf Eggington and Wren 1997; Herriman and Burnaby 1996) or an international or foreign language (Hong Kong, Japan, and Thailand, cf Dickson and Cumming 1996). My perspective is therefore comparative, observing how
a sample of instructors in the AMEP have addressed certain curriculum options in ESL writing instruction in comparison to what people working in other, related programs for immigrant settlement or for academic studies at universities do. My vantage point is admittedly from afar, as a Canadian who knows the AMEP as an observer, rather than being engaged directly in it. My overall impression is that the AMEP has handled, adroitly and with some uniqueness, options for ESL writing instruction that are at once common, as well as variable, internationally.

**Context of the research**

I approached this research as an opportunity to document the educational views of highly experienced instructors of ESL writing about their teaching practices in a variety of different, but related, contexts. At the same time, I wanted to identify commonalities or differences between situations where English writing was taught as (a) either a foreign or second language, and (b) either for academic purposes in universities or for settlement purposes in immigrant settlement programs. I selected three countries where English was the dominant language (Australia, New Zealand, and the province of Ontario in Canada) and where English was taught for both academic purposes (to visiting or immigrant students in universities) and settlement purposes (in federally sponsored programs for recent immigrants). For contrast, I selected four other countries or regions where English was taught at universities as an international or foreign language (that is, not widely spoken in local communities but used in some institutions). These were Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, and the province of Quebec in Canada. I aimed for a small, purposive sample of instructors so I initially contacted administrators of distinctive ESL programs in two major cities in each country, and asked them to nominate instructors who were acknowledged locally for their expertise and knowledge about teaching writing to adults learning English.

As shown in Table 1, I interviewed 48 instructors, all in the first half of 1999. Thirty-one interviews were in English-dominant countries; 17 were in contexts where English is an international language. Among the English-dominant countries, 19 interviews were in academic programs at universities and 12 were in immigrant settlement programs (such as the AMEP, that is, government-sponsored agencies or adult education programs at school boards). All of the instructors were highly experienced at teaching ESL/EFL writing, all had relevant post-graduate degrees (most with doctorates), most had published articles or books on ESL writing, and about a third had distinctive international reputations for their research in this domain.

For the interviews I asked each person to answer four questions:

(a) How is the curriculum for ESL or EFL writing organised in your institution?
(b) Could you describe a typical syllabus for an ESL or EFL writing course at your institution? Please select one course that you usually teach.

(c) How are students typically assessed in their ESL or EFL writing?

(d) What achievements do you usually see your students make?

I audio-recorded the interviews, took detailed notes during the interviews, and collected course outlines and samples of instructional materials. I promised the instructors full confidentiality, so no names of individuals or institutions are cited here. To analyse these data I selectively transcribed from the 48 tape recordings of the interviews the statements from each person that most clearly represented their responses to each of the four interview questions. I then reviewed the transcripts, my notes, and course documents, attempting to identify prevalent themes that the instructors expressed about their teaching practices, using a constant-comparative method of grounded interpretation recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) and other qualitative researchers. Specifically, I reviewed all of the transcribed interviews and notes five times, identifying, categorising, and cross-checking what I considered to be important topics. Then I inserted these into a single computer file, and tried to reduce these further to the most essential and recurring topics. For each topic analysed (that is, here and in Cumming 2001, in press), I tallied each mention of the topic for each instructor, then I prepared summary tallies for each program type (that is, settlement versus university program), setting type (that is, second versus foreign language settings), and country, then I looked for consistencies and patterns within and across these categories.

For verification, I conducted a member check with the people I had interviewed by asking them to read drafts of two articles I had prepared on the study. Sixteen participants responded to me (all by email), mostly stating that they

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**Table 1: Contexts of the 48 interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement programs</th>
<th>A c a d e m i c programs</th>
<th>English is the majority language</th>
<th>English is an international language</th>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand (6)</td>
<td>New Zealand (6)</td>
<td>Hong Kong (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia* (3)</td>
<td>Australia* (7)</td>
<td>Thailand (5)</td>
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<td>Canada (Ont.) (3)</td>
<td>Canada (Ont.) (6)</td>
<td>Japan (6)</td>
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<td>Canada (Que.) (2)</td>
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* Interviewees in Australia worked in either New South Wales or Queensland

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found my analyses interesting and appropriate; most of these people added refinements or factual corrections to quotations I had extracted from their interviews.

I have focused the present analyses on the AMEP, as one among three federally sponsored settlement programs represented in the research sample, akin to similar programs for ESL settlement in Canada and New Zealand (cf Cumming 1998a). More comprehensive and detailed analyses of the findings from the overall study appear as Cumming (2001) focused on assessment issues, and Cumming (in press) focused on curriculum issues. In the interviews and analyses below, I have used the term *syllabus* to refer narrowly to a fixed plan for instruction (for example, a course outline or program policy, representing the basic elements of what is intended to be taught) and the term *curriculum* more comprehensively to describe the enactment of teaching and learning that people performed and experienced in the context of a particular course (see Stern, Allen and Harley 1992: 20).

Four aspects of this research are worth highlighting. First, it is empirical. Rather than advocating principles for teaching ESL writing based on intuitive analyses, as in most prescriptions of teaching methods (for example, Ferris and Hedgcock 1998: 51–122; Reid 1993: 73–145; Shih 1986), I sought to identify what people say they actually do in their teaching. Second, and related to the previous point, I focus on the practical, professional knowledge of experienced teachers. The value of this perspective has already been demonstrated in many publications about curricula in the AMEP (for example, Bottomley, Dalton and Corbel 1994; Burns and Hood 1995, 1998; Nunan 1988) and in educational research broadly (for example, Clark and Peterson 1986; Connelly and Clandinin 1988), including second-language education (for example, Freeman and Johnson 1998; Freeman and Richards 1996; Johnson 1999; Woods 1996). Third, this research was limited to interviews. Not having systematically observed any of the instructors teaching, I cannot determine whether what they said in interviews corresponds to what they really do in their teaching. Indeed, it may be, as some studies of ESL writing have found, that interviews emphasise teachers’ beliefs about what they would ideally like to be doing in their teaching (Pennington, Costa, So, Shing, Hirose and Niedzielski 1997; Shi and Cumming 1995). Likewise, without comparable data on students’ achievements in each location, I cannot evaluate the effectiveness of any of the teaching practices described. Fourth, the people I interviewed were selected for their expertise in ESL writing, so they are not representative of the population of teachers at large in any one country nor program. Although their statements certainly reflect current teaching practices (and may even point toward exemplary practices), their statements are those of selected, highly experienced ESL writing instructors.
only. I should add that the sample of instructors from settlement programs in Australia included just three people, and the overall sample of just ten people from Australia was from only two states (New South Wales and Queensland), so I can offer no account of the diversity of situations, beliefs, or orientations that surely exist throughout this (or any other) country.

**Commonalities**

I was surprised, upon analysing these data, at the commonalities that appeared. Most strikingly, I was not able to determine any consistent differences in the interview data between situations where English is taught as a foreign or as a second language nor between writing instruction in the academic or in the immigrant settlement programs. This was despite the fact that a major purpose of my inquiry, and the rationale for my sampling design, was to distinguish these situations. There were certain unique elements, of course, within each country. But there were no common elements that uniformly spanned either the socio-linguistic contexts or the program types, across the countries, such as would indicate they are characteristic of differences in foreign/second socio-linguistic contexts or of educational program types internationally. So I concluded that, at least for this sample of highly experienced instructors, the domain of ESL writing is converging toward common principles and practices internationally (Cumming, in press). Some of the reasons for this convergence cited in the interviews were: (a) professional networks, conferences, and publications, particularly student textbooks and style guides for writing; (b) postgraduate education, notably in countries where English is an international language (that is, Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand), as most of the instructors I spoke to had previously studied, lived, or taught in countries where English was the dominant language (that is, Australia, Canada, England, or the United States); and (c) the impact of research and theory (for example, about composing processes, rhetorical analyses, teaching methods, et cetera) as sources of information and conceptualisations, both locally and internationally.

**Some notable differences**

Certain differences did appear across the countries and the program types, but with respect to options for curriculum organisation that I had not anticipated. Their nature is worth examining for the AMEP because this program seems to have addressed these options in noteworthy ways with regard to: (a) the theoretical foundations of curriculum; (b) the integration of curriculum components; (c) the specificity or generality of learners’ purposes; and (d) variability in assessment practices.
THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Except for those working in the AMEP, instructors in all of the other countries and program types where I collected data each expressed a relatively unique, individual, and eclectic conceptualisation of ESL writing curricula, based on their extensive professional experiences and a variety of source ideas. In contrast, the instructors in the AMEP defined their concepts of ESL writing in respect to a common basis of linguistic theory and frameworks for curriculum and assessment. Theoretically, systemic-functional linguistics and genre theory visibly underpinned the thinking of instructors in the AMEP about ESL writing. Likewise, the competency-based, outcomes-oriented curriculum, defined by the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) (New South Wales Adult Migrant English Service 1998), formed a core around which instructors described their teaching and curriculum practices. For example,

It is a text-based syllabus. The outcomes are generalised, using genre theory, in terms of whole texts and picking up salient language components. We use a scaffolded approach, based on cycles of learning, where the teacher gradually stands back as students begin to take control. Teachers design courses, based on assessments of students’ needs and working toward particular outcomes. Specific genres are set out already, and the teacher customises them to learners’ needs. The teacher’s job is to specify the register, usually with prototypical examples of text types. (Australia)

These instructors in the AMEP typically combined key concepts from linguistic theory (that is, genre, register, and text types) with concepts of pedagogy (that is, scaffolding, cycles of learning, students’ needs). These ideas correspond to those articulated for ESL writing in Feez’s (1998) Text-based syllabus design, but they appear in a variety of other sources, notably issues of the present journal (Prospect) and a large number of other publications from the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR). As one person put it, these ideas have for many years been the focus of public deliberations, postgraduate studies and in-service courses for teachers, as well as exchanges between theoreticians, educational practitioners, and those implementing government policies:

Debates about writing have been very intense here. For example, in Britain, educators have been compartmentalised. But in Australia that is not the case. Theoretical developments cross fields. There are close relations between researchers and teachers. This has produced very positive things. (Australia)

In sum, the AMEP appears to have established both a theoretical foundation and curriculum framework that unifies, with some cohesion and focus, the ways in which ESL writing instructors conceptualise their curricula and syllabi. In contrast, instructors in other countries and program types (including university
programs in Australia) conceptualised their curricula for ESL writing in various, individualised, and diverse ways. About a fifth of the people I interviewed did refer to genre theory as guiding principles, but outside of Australia, instructors usually appealed to a different form of genre theory (from versions based on systemic-functional linguistics), derived from rhetorical theory or analyses of specific-purpose texts (cf. Hyon 1996; Johns in press). From this orientation, the principal instructional decisions these instructors reported making related to selecting, designing and sequencing the tasks that students were to write. About a quarter of the instructors conceptualised their curricula for ESL/EFL instruction in terms of smaller, functional units of writing, such as formal text units, stylistic devices, or lexico-grammatical features of academic prose. About a third of the instructors described their courses as having the primary goal of prompting students to practise and develop their processes for composing in English, essentially as an autonomous skill acquired through activities for information-gathering, writing practice and group cooperation in drafting or editing, and instructional feedback. Two other conceptualisations of ESL/EFL writing courses were emphasised by a few instructors in different locations internationally. One was with reference to topical themes or the study of substantive content. Themes of relevance to students, or selected by them, set a purpose and logical coherence for the course, as well as key ideas that students addressed and wrote about. A fifth conceptualisation appeared among three instructors who defined the primary goal of their writing courses to be the development of students’ expressive capacities, based on their personal experiences and opinions as well as their learning to craft and refine these ideas in prose.

Despite variable emphases, these ways of conceptualising ESL writing overlap considerably and interrelate with each other. Most instructors, in fact, referred to several of them in describing their teaching practices (while nonetheless emphasising one of them). In essence, they represent different but complementary ways of defining writing for the purposes of instruction (Cumming 1998b). Viewed as curriculum ‘options’ (in the manner described by Stern, Allen and Harley 1992: 103–273), they pose alternative means of defining the multidimensional aspects of writing possible for language study. What is notable about the ideas of the instructors specialising in writing instruction in the AMEP that I interviewed, is the singularity of their conceptualisations, compared to the diversity that appears in other programs and situations that involve teaching ESL writing internationally.

**INTEGRATION OF CURRICULUM COMPONENTS**

A second issue on which these instructors differed internationally was whether the ESL writing courses they taught were independent, stand-alone courses or
were integrated in combination with other curriculum components. About two-thirds of the instructors taught writing either wholly or partially integrated with other curriculum components, whereas about one-third taught writing as an independent course. The rationales cited for ESL writing courses to be delivered independently (usually as a particular course for academic credit in a university context) typically centred on the idea that writing represented a substantive area of need for students. At one extreme (of students highly proficient in English), students were perceived to have mastered basic aspects of communication in English, and now required honing of their skills in the complexities and intricacies of writing. At the other extreme (of students with limited literacy in English), students (particularly those just starting university or aiming for employment) were perceived to need to study writing because they had not previously done so, either in English or (in some instances) in their mother tongues, and so therefore needed to acquire basic literacy skills.

In the AMEP, the instructors I interviewed all expressed a common belief in the value of integrating writing closely with other aspects of language ability and the curriculum. The reasons for this seem to relate to their shared theoretical foundations around genre theory and the CSWE as a curriculum framework. Each instructor described their writing pedagogy with reference to a teaching/learning cycle that involved integrating learners’ substantive and linguistic knowledge, reading, talking, and writing. For example:

Students need to know what they are writing about. So content has to be integrated with literacy. We spend lots of time building knowledge of a topic and talking about it, such as political issues, dealing with supermarkets, renters’ rights, or rainforests. This integrates speaking and reading with writing. Students build up their vocabulary and information as they read texts about the topic. Then we select a couple of genres, for example, information reports and exposition. We look at examples with various kinds of texts, how tense and grammar are utilised, and these form models for the participants. Then we do a shared writing exercise. As a teacher, I provide scaffolding for the students and models of writing. Then the students write on their own, based on the knowledge they have accumulated and the shared activities. So there is guaranteed success. This is followed up by individual teacher-student conferencing, then maybe further input through reading or fieldwork, and so on. Or I introduce a critical perspective on it, which is what I try to advocate with the students. (Australia)

This rationale, typical of the AMEP instructors I spoke with, corresponds to justifications given in diverse contexts internationally for writing to be integrated with other components in ESL curricula. For instance, some instructors observed how writing is holistically interdependent on other modes of communication (such as reading, speaking, and listening), others cited the potential for learning through writing to integrate knowledge gleaned from reading or talking, and
SPECIFICITY OR GENERALITY OF LEARNERS’ PURPOSES

The most pronounced difference emerging from my analyses concerned instructors’ conceptualisations of their writing curricula as serving either specific or general purposes (see Cumming 2001). As Swales (2000), among others, has explained, the logic of specific purposes curriculum design is that language curricula are modelled on analyses (for example, of discourse, vocabulary, speech functions, et cetera) of particular situations in which students will have future needs for using the target language (for example, Japanese for tour guides, English for waiters). The training approach that follows from this orientation to curriculum contrasts with more general purposes for language learning and use, which aim to develop students’ communicative capacities in more broadly educational, or less narrowly predictable, terms (Widdowson 1983). Most of the instructors who conceived of their ESL writing curricula in terms of learners’ specific purposes did so with reference to particular fields of academic or professional study for which their students were engaged or planned to pursue in their future careers. These domains formed the focus of teaching, for example, ESL writing for teachers, lawyers, engineers, nurses, and so on. The content of such courses was typically defined from needs analyses of the texts that students would need to produce, including aspects of vocabulary, rhetorical or cohesive forms, and grammatical structures. In immigrant settlement contexts, specific purposes tended to focus on writing for vocational purposes, for instance:

We are contracted by an employment centre to train new migrants with good tertiary qualifications and professional experience but who lack English proficiency, are unfamiliar with the context, and don’t know about the employment situation here. Writing is only part of the curriculum. It is largely workplace texts, such as recounts of an accident, workplace memos, letters of applications, or written reports. (New Zealand)

In contrast, more general purposes for teaching ESL writing prevailed among about two-thirds of the instructors I interviewed. Many claimed they taught ‘academic writing’ (that is, a hybrid between specific and general purposes, suited to literate, university contexts). But three additional rationales for general-purpose orientations to writing instruction also appeared. One rationale perceived students to have deficits or needs for learning to write that had not previously been addressed in their education, in a manner akin to the argument cited above for writing to be taught through independent courses. A second rationale for general-purpose orientations emphasised the diversity of students: because ESL student populations were so different in their abilities, backgrounds, and needs, only a very general
approach to writing instruction appeared feasible to address all. This rationale appears in a quotation from a Canadian instructor:

There is a huge spectrum of students. In the most basic courses, some students have been in Canada for a long time but have been laid off jobs, and who can’t fill in job applications. There are discrepancies in their abilities, too. For example, some Middle Eastern students speak better than they write, and some Hong Kong students write better than they speak. At the intermediate level, people are fairly well educated, but there are a number of Arabic speakers with limited literacy. In the advanced courses, people are hoping to go on to university or college, so they are already fairly well educated. We did have a basic literacy class until last year, but it was funded per student, and the numbers were low, so we cancelled the class. But those were the people who needed it most. (Canada)

A third rationale for general-purpose orientations appeared among instructors who (either organising their courses around topical themes or to promote individual students’ expressive abilities) defined their curricula on the basis of interests voiced and constructed by their students:

Writing emerges from topics of interest in class. The students are not looking for jobs or university entrance. They want to know about Canadian society, values, and current events. So the writing is organised around these interests. Writing is an extension of topics of relevance to students. (Canada)

Instructors working in the AMEP who I interviewed had opted for a position on this issue that seems to be intermediate between these extremes. On the one hand, the competencies and text types defined in the CSWE are specific, and for each competency level, specific purposes for writing are defined for instructors and students alike. On the other hand, these definitions are general, open to unique interpretations by each instructor, and with reference to each learner group forming a class in the AMEP. This intermediary position seemed, according to the interviews I conducted, to permit instructors a flexibility in their curriculum planning that they preferred, but it also posed some uncertainties with respect to the situations of particular students and about the desirability of a uniform syllabus framework in the AMEP. For example,

A problem is that the CSWE prescribes text types, so sometimes there is an artificiality to this, because students may not actually need to learn these specific text types or to use them in their lives. Another problem is that some learners make slow progress. Or writing at the designated text level may not be possible, if they have low literacy. The curriculum is competency based, so students have to achieve specific competencies. But the competencies required may not be the same for every student. Judgements about this have to be more holistic and based on practice over the years. (Australia)
Variability in assessment

Defining curricula for ESL writing in terms of either specific (that is, narrow) or general (that is, broad) terms was closely associated, among the people I interviewed, with issues of student assessment (as described in detail in Cumming 2001). In particular, opting for ESL writing curricula with reference to specific purposes seemed to provide concrete, straightforward criteria and methods for the assessment of students’ achievements in writing. But these tended to take a narrow view of what writing or literacy is, and therefore of what students might be trained to do in their courses. For example, in New Zealand, an instructor in a settlement ESL program for employment purposes used the competencies defined in the program’s syllabus to prescribe teaching and assessment activities alike:

We do competency-based assessment. Analyses of register and appropriateness define the task and give the criteria. If the student achieves the task, then they are certified for having done it. If it is not achieved or only partly achieved, they resubmit it. The criteria for these really open up their eyes and broaden their perspectives on what makes for good writing. (New Zealand)

In contrast, instructors who defined their ESL writing courses in general terms each cited a diverse array of assessment methods as well as a wide variety of different types of achievement that they perceived their students to make. For example, ESL writing instructors who adopted general-purpose orientations in their courses described methods of assessment that included proficiency tests, rating scales, university-type examinations, grading of assignments, portfolios (for example, Murray 1994), as well as various combinations of these assessment methods. More consequentially, these instructors described their students as making qualitatively different types of achievements in their courses, ranging from achievements in language and style, self-confidence and expressive abilities, composing processes, rhetorical abilities, to acculturation (for example, into academic or societal contexts). Viewed positively, the variety of methods and criteria for assessing learners in general-purpose ESL writing courses would seem to encourage a wide range of possible achievements among students, suitable to the complex nature of second-language writing itself (Cumming 1998b). But viewed more critically, I wonder if the general-purpose orientation encompasses such a variety of possible learning outcomes, in ways that are diffusely defined and difficult to discern, that the opportunities students may have to learn ESL writing might vary greatly from course to course and instructor to instructor.

In the AMEP, the instructors I interviewed appealed to both general and specific purposes for assessment. As one instructor put it, the CSWE functions in specific terms by stipulating precise criteria for students to achieve; it also
functions in general terms by permitting instructors to develop long-term profiles on their students’ achievements and to judge their readiness for competency assessments:

The CSWE sets the points at which students have to be assessed, determined by students’ readiness, the length of the course, and other external constraints. This is a one-shot thing, though many teachers use a portfolio approach to build up evidence that a student is ready to achieve a particular outcome. The teacher indicates that students will be tested at a certain point. Some teachers inform students and some do not, as they do not think it is ‘high stakes’. Students do the task and the teacher consults the CSWE documents to see if the competencies are achieved. A moderation process should be in place, using a kit on moderation. But there is variability on this between course providers. (Australia)

Like most outcomes-oriented curricula, use of the CSWE for assessment in the AMEP helps to clarify the achievements expected of students, to link curriculum specifications and teaching activities directly to assessment and reporting methods, and to provide a basis for analyses of collective trends in the program, as demonstrated by Ross (2000). But as Brindley (1995, 1998, 2000) and Smith (2000) have demonstrated, concerns exist about the variability of assessments of writing in the AMEP, including the construct validity of tasks for writing, reliability among instructors scoring different task types in diverse locations, and the generalisability of these assessment tasks to language performance in other contexts. Undoubtedly the same could be said of nearly every assessment scheme described in the interviews I conducted. However, a difference is that the AMEP is a nation-wide program, which requires common standards and accountability throughout Australia, whereas almost all of the other ESL writing instructors I interviewed did their assessments solely within the contexts of a single institution or course.

Concluding remarks
The practices for ESL writing instruction reported by the AMEP instructors interviewed in this study stand out, in comparison to the expressed practices of comparable instructors internationally, in terms of the ways in which they:
• shared a developed, theoretical foundation for their understanding of ESL writing as well as the common curriculum guiding the program;
• agreed upon the value of integrating writing closely with other aspects of language ability and curricula;
• combined both a specific and general purpose orientation to their conceptualisation of students’ purposes for learning English;
• tried to handle issues of variability in student assessment.
These trends appear to accord the AMEP a relatively unique status among ESL programs internationally, at least from the perspective of the instructors I interviewed who are highly experienced in the program. This distinction may have appeared in the present research because the AMEP was the only program operating on a nation-wide basis, and with an established history of curriculum development, that I contacted. The comparable ESL settlement programs in Canada or New Zealand are considerably newer, or operate on a more disparate basis in each respective country. At the same time, this distinction may suggest that the professional development, resources and inquiry that have informed the AMEP over the past two decades have helped those working in this program to address programmatically certain of the curricular issues that instructors working in more localised contexts (for example, at universities or in single courses) have barely been able to consider on their own.

I must caution, however, that the interview methods used in this study only begin to describe the delicate and vital links between curricula, teaching, learning, and achievement that exist in educational practices. The comparative approach I used helped to illuminate certain commonalities and differences in ESL writing instruction internationally, overcoming the restricted focus of the case study analyses of single contexts that has characterised most other inquiry in this domain. But more extensive, rigorous methods of research, such as ethnographic observation, achievement testing, longitudinal inquiry, and empirical modelling need to explore the issues raised in the present article, particularly to establish how ESL students’ writing might be influenced by the approaches to teaching that their instructors adopt (for example, see Cumming and Riazi 2000).

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