



Book Review

“Writing for Change: An Advanced ELL Resource

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APA Citation: Haq, H. (2021). Book Review: Writing for change: An advanced ELL resource. *Focus on ELT Journal*, 3(2), 65-68. <https://doi.org/10.14744/felt.2021.3.2.5>

Writing for Change: An Advanced ELL Resource. Inés Poblet. Whatcom Community College Library. (2021).

<https://textbooks.whatcom.edu/WritingforChange/front-matter/introduction/>

Writing for Change: An Advanced ELL
Resource



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In the following paper, I review the text *Writing for Change: An Advanced ELL Resource* by Inés Poblet, an Associate Professor at the World Language Department at Whatcom Community College in Bellingham, Washington. Poblet is academically interested in sociolinguistics, culturally responsive teaching, the learning experiences of systemically non-dominant learners, the decolonization of English language teaching, code-switching, and code-meshing. Poblet comes from a bilingual background, possessing a Mexican American heritage and having immigrated from Buenos Aires, Argentina (Cascadia Open Education Summit, 2021).

The text is an open-access web-text available in three formats: PDF, Online, and XML. It has been published by Whatcom Community College and is licensed under a Creative

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Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. In essence, this allows the reader to both share and distribute the material under certain terms, such as giving appropriating credit (“Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0),” n.d.). This text is hosted by the “Open Textbook Library”, which defines an open textbook “as one that has an open license that makes it free for anyone to use and change” (Open Textbook Library, n.d.). Naturally, this is the case for all the textbooks hosted on the platform, many of which were published only recently.

The text, being a web-text, has no page numbers. It begins with Poblet’s addressing the educators, and specifically the English language teachers who would be using or employing this text. Poblet makes it clear that this text is meant to be a resource “in the work of anti-racism and decolonization in the field of English language teaching” (Poblet, 2021). Poblet also immediately offers her own narrative story, arguing that through unpacking “the narratives that brought us to who we are today, we begin the work of growing with and caring about human kind” (Poblet, 2021). As someone whom herself was “overwhelmed by the realities of systemic oppression”, Poblet presents this book as part of her larger goal of “building English language learner resources”, in light of her personal discovery of “anti-racist, culturally responsive, and decolonization approaches” (Poblet, 2021). In this section, Poblet also includes activities for the educators to reflect upon their identities before embarking on instruction.

Writing for Change is a writing textbook that is designed to teach writing in the context of inclusivity. As much as it can be seen as an ELT text, it is also a text appropriate for the introductory English composition classroom. The text can be considered a practical workbook in that it presents very little theoretical content, but teachers writing through the application. The chapters are organized into six sections, as follows:

- A. Warm-Up
- B. Vocabulary Preview
- C. Read all about it
- D. Discussion
- E. Topics for Writing
- F. Project!
- G. Additional Writing

All these sections include various models and activities for practice, readings and discussions pertaining to community organizers, activists, and social justice movements, writing prompts that call upon learners to reflect on the topics, and projects inviting the learners to apply the content in the contexts of their respective community environments (Poblet, 2021). The text, being an interactive one, also includes resources in multiple modalities to complement the main text, including videos, articles, and podcasts (Poblet, 2021).

The text is divided into seven chapters, including two proceeding sections and a final appendix. The first section, “Creating Our Classroom Culture”, focuses on the term “collectivism”. Students are walked through an activity to discover the definition of this term, followed by group activities where students discuss aspects such as self-health and their ideal learning environments amongst each other. Eventually, this culminates in students working individually to set personal and collective goals. Most importantly, it allows for the setting of a frame of thought at the very beginning of any respective course.

The second section, “Getting Ready to Write”, is where students are exposed to the knowledge of basic essay writing. Like the format followed throughout the book, it does this in a “walk-through” fashion. Students begin by discussing their own experiences in strategizing for a given writing assignment amongst each other. This is followed by a “puzzle piece” activity, where students are taught to see assignment instructions as parts of the respective “puzzle piece”. Students are given an opportunity to check their understanding of this on a sample assignment thereafter. From here, students are walked through brainstorming and introductions, body paragraphs, and conclusions, often complemented with advice relevant to the underlying theme of the book (which is highlighted in bold). For example, in the brainstorming, Poblet states that its main goal is “...to allow yourself space and time to think without boundaries, limitations, or judgments” (Poblet, 2021).

Chapters 1-7 all follow a very similar model in their organization. All the chapters relate to a topic of discussion tied into the larger theme of the web-text. These are titled “Identity, World Englishes”, Power and Poverty, ¡Si, Se Puede!, Food Deserts, Protecting Mauna Kea, and Black Lives Matter”. Generally, the given chapter starts with a warm-up on student discussion related to the concept of identity, followed by vocabulary related to the topic. After some brief background reading related to the concepts, various prompts for discussion are presented where students take roles and amongst themselves and consider the questions in groups. Students are then given topics of writing to consider related to the topic, and an idea for an instructional project on the given topic is then proposed. Finally, additional multimedia resources are linked, including relevant videos, podcasts, and further readings. The book ends with an Appendix that includes twenty-two readings pertaining to “Decolonizing ELT”.

In reflecting on the text, I see it as valuable in the sense that it is a resource that combines pedagogy with inclusivity. In the case of composition studies, the primary lens by which I view the text, there has been a push in the field over the past years to work teach writing in a way that embraces identity and promotes social justice. This text, alongside its character of being open access, has great potential to be an asset in this regard. As much as the text frames its prompts and discussions into topics of personal identity and social justice issues, it allows for student practice in the important basics of writing.

This text can even be used as a standalone text for an introductory English composition course, alongside its intended aim of being an advanced ELT writing text. The text is also valuable in its accessibility which is appropriate considering its ultimate mission. It is also structured in a way that allows for easy lesson planning from the instructor.

The text is limited in the sense that it does not include important instruction related to the rhetorical theories and practices that are central to composition and writing education. This would have been useful in an advanced ELL writing resource book. Its respective PDF version is also ineffectively formatted.

All in all, this text serves a dual purpose, one that advances instruction and one that advances social justice. Such texts are needed in our ever-diverse classrooms, where we, as educators, have a responsibility to give our students the confidence to express their voices in the most effective way possible.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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