

Book review

**Writing with students: New perspectives on
collaborative writing in EAP contexts**

Lucy Macnaught
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280 pages

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Lucy Macnaught's book, *Writing with students: New perspectives on collaborative writing in EAP contexts*, draws attention to the linguistic challenges international students face when engaging in academic learning in a second language. While most colleges and universities require English proficiency tests, success in these assessments does not always equate to students' ability to navigate unfamiliar content, discipline-specific vocabulary, culturally embedded language, and the anxieties associated with studying in a new linguistic and academic environment.

This book examines the teaching approach of 'joint construction' in a genre-based approach to academic English writing, where teachers and students collaboratively build a text. It is grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which views language as a system of

choices for meaning making, emphasising the social context and functions of language rather than just its structure. The book serves as both a practitioner-focused resource for teachers new to collaborative writing or those looking to refine their practice, and as a qualitative research reference for scholars investigating joint construction.

The book comprises eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides the backdrop to writing development in EAP contexts, including influential teaching approaches, the impact of genre traditions, and the evolution of SFL genre pedagogies. Chapter 2 considers the design of joint construction through the metaphor of scaffolding. Chapters 3 to 5 focus on practical applications, detailing the enactment of joint construction in the classroom. Chapter 6 summarises the role of metalanguage in the classroom, while Chapter 7 presents a broader theoretical foundation for conducting classroom discourse analysis from a socio-semiotic perspective. The book concludes with Chapter 8, which revisits earlier examples to integrate them into the wider theoretical framework of SFL. Each chapter ends with a summary, reflection points, and critical questions for consideration.

As a TESOL-qualified practitioner, I was particularly drawn to the classroom student-teacher interactions illustrated in Chapters 3-5, which I explore in greater depth. These interactions, taken from transcripts of classroom discussions with four university-qualified TESOL/Applied Linguistics instructors, provide authentic and enlightening examples of teacher-student collaboration in joint writing tasks. These exchanges offer models of classroom talk that can help practitioners take a leading role in fostering learning, enhancing communication and social skills, and laying a foundation for language and literacy by encouraging students to explore ideas, clarify understanding, and articulate their thoughts.

Chapter 3 specifically examines what students do in joint construction. In these interactions, teachers and students collaboratively outline a text, using labels to identify content sequences and provide a structured roadmap for constructing the text. A key concept here is the micro-task—a highly detailed view of the activities students undertake during joint writing tasks. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 present classroom discourse samples that contain a series of micro-tasks which exemplify the student's role in the joint construction of a text and how they

- Extend or modify the wording of the text; and
- Reflect on what wording has been selected or could be selected about the text.

Macnaught emphasises that while ‘idea generation’ is a valuable aspect of writing, it serves a different function in joint construction. I agree with her perspective that academic writing processes, related to purpose, structure, and language use, can be disrupted if they are regularly conflated with brainstorming and idea creation.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to the teacher’s role in joint construction. Macnaught challenges the notion that teachers merely facilitate classroom activities to get “words on the board” (p. 89). Instead, she highlights the importance of promoting the “flow of meaning” (p. 107) and managing dynamic, fast-paced classroom interactions. Macnaught continues to provide examples of student-teacher interactions, including multimodal interactions, to exemplify how meanings are introduced and then mediated through classroom talk. The examples also emphasise the concept of future orientation - the recurrent choices that could be made again in independent writing - which is a critical consideration in an academic English classroom. Here, supporting the development of a shared classroom metalanguage as part of appraising words, sharing reasoning, exploring alternatives and asking questions is a way that students can draw on, and be reminded of, prior learning, try out new wording, and develop reasoning and criteria to apply to their future independent writing. Future orientation is further explored in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 5, Maclaughlin focusses on how teachers provide guidance during the joint construction process. Using another student-teacher interaction, this chapter extends the text outline approach from chapter 3 as a way to demonstrate hands-on management of joint construction. The interaction provides a more detailed and complex writing sample that illustrates how students list and introduce an argument and then coordinate their contribution to explain their argument. It is an effective interaction that details how teachers lead and organise the co-construction of a text across an entire lesson.

Overall, *Writing with students* is a highly practical and well-written resource for teachers, lecturers, researchers, and TESOL students.

While its primary focus is on international students, its insights could be equally relevant in other educational contexts, such as higher certificate-level migrant English programs, adult literacy courses, and primary and secondary classrooms. Macnaught also raises thought-provoking questions about the challenges of joint construction, including classroom preparation, engaging reserved students, and managing mixed-ability classrooms. These provocations invite discussions of other possibilities that can impact TESOL classes such as the positive reinforcement needed to develop a student's often negative identity as a writer, the coordination of absenteeism that can impact the flow of writing classes, the use of translation devices and artificial intelligence as writing tools, and strategies needed to promote a respectful and welcoming classroom to share thoughts and value mistakes as important learning opportunities.

Final Thoughts: This book is a valuable contribution to the field of collaborative writing in EAP contexts. It offers both theoretical depth and practical guidance, making it an accessible and very helpful resource for educators seeking to enhance their teaching of academic writing through joint construction.