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A Social History of Second Language Writing: First Generation L2 Composition Scholars in the Process Era

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A SOCIAL HISTORY OF SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING: FIRST GENERATION L2
COMPOSITION SCHOLARS IN THE PROCESS ERA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: A Social History of Second Language Writing: First Generation L2 Composition
Scholars in the Process Era

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This is a qualitative study of the social history of the field of second language writing (SLW) during the Process Era (1976 to present) when the number of English language learners at North American colleges and universities grew rapidly and dramatically. The premise of this study is that scholars are important subjects of investigation. Their influences, experiences, social interactions, and the underlying sociopolitical landscape shaped the way in which ideas about L2 writing were constructed.

This study shows that the scholarly activities of the pioneers of the field of SLW were influenced by two disciplines—applied linguistics and composition studies. By tracing the simultaneous, parallel and sometimes converging development of the fields of applied linguistics and composition studies, the study shows the evolution of the philosophies and characteristics of each field. Applied linguistics evolved from a practice-driven, pragmatic approach to language instruction while composition studies grew out of sociopolitical forces and a driving need for change.

Scholars were geographically dispersed according to disciplinary predilections. East Coast scholars were influenced by the composition studies tradition in their approach to research and classroom instruction. They favored process writing

instruction, cognitive research, and with the advent of social constructionism, an understanding the needs of the L2 writer based on the broader context of institutional writing. They viewed the writer as cognitively adept and also actively engaged in her own learning.

West Coast scholars favored an applied linguistics approach to research and writing instruction. They were proponents of contrastive rhetoric and genre. Rhetorical organization and text development needed to satisfy the needs of the reader, and, under the philosophy of social constructionism, the discourse community. The L2 writer was subordinate to text and discourse community.

Scholars from the West coast, East coast, and the Midwest were involved in growing the field by (co)editing journals with an interest in L2 writing. The journals examined include *Teaching English Composition to Foreign or Resident Students*, *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *College ESL*, and *Journal of Second Language Writing*. The sociopolitical context and the influence of the parent disciplines are two themes that run throughout this study.