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Communication Highwire: Leveraging the Power of Diverse Communication Styles - Dianne Hofner Saphiere, Barbara Kappler Mikk, and Basma Ibrahim DeVries

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*Destinations 2: Grammar for Academic Success*

Nancy Herzfeld-Pipkin

Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2006.

FAY IKIN

University of Southampton, UK

*Destinations 2: Grammar for Academic Success* by Nancy Herzfeld-Pipkin aims to provide students with competent grammar skills in the difficult realm of academic writing. It is meant as either an independent study book or as a companion to *Destinations 2: Writing for Academic Success*. This is stated clearly in the foreword, in which Herzfeld-Pipkin also gives overviews of the units, lessons, and appendices contained in the book.

The units in *Destinations 2* comprehensively cover a wide range of English grammatical rules. The units are organized very clearly, each one focusing on specific aspects of grammar. These topics are verbs and verb tenses; modals; passives and conditionals; nouns, articles, prepositions and adjectives, gerunds, and infinitives. Each topic is made up of lessons that, as Herzfeld-Pipkin states, allow students to familiarize themselves with and practice the different grammatical rules. These lessons begin with photographs and example sentences that relate to the writing companion book and introduce the grammatical rule in question. Following these are questions that encourage the analysis of specific parts of example sentences, and then come explanations of the rules that are displayed in charts, examples, and discussions. Finally, the practice section involves diverse activities such as sentence completion, short-answer questions, spotting and correcting mistakes, and comprehension tasks.

Herzfeld-Pipkin has obviously made a conscious effort to vary the work provided in each lesson, and this definitely comes across. She includes several different types of activities and these are treated in interesting enough ways that the students should find it easy to maintain their concentration. Many activities are based on photographs or pictures or are real-world examples, and they often require creative or independent thinking from the students. Another important strength is that the work is versatile: It can be used in the classroom for group or individual activities, or it can be set as homework if the teacher is confident enough in the students' abilities.

A CD-ROM accompaniment complements the teacher's resources provided in *Destinations 2* with the program ExamView. This is a database covering both the writing and grammar textbooks, and the grammar text's question bank has an impressive 720 questions. By using the exam-paper generator,

exam papers and quizzes can be created that cover any range of material, from one topic, to a selection from the whole *Destinations* book, or the entire series. Teachers can select not only from which topic the questions are taken but also the format of the questions, such as essays, multiple-choice questions, or true/false statements. The software also allows the import of custom questions into the database as well as customizing the look of the exam papers themselves. It is a new, efficient, and easy way of assessing students' progress. ExamView is intuitively designed and it takes a very short time to design an exam. Many of the other functions, such as class rosters and score databases, could prove unnecessary, given that most institutions will have their own systems in use. The program also offers the option of importing the tests to WebCT or Blackboard sites, which may be useful to some teachers.

Many of the activities and materials in the book are expanded upon in the companion textbook, and for the integrated experience this other textbook should also be used. However, this, coupled with the numerous workbooks that are also available and suggested as additional texts, could make using this series prohibitively expensive for tight budgets. Another noticeable weakness of this book is that the intended target students are unclear. Herzfeld-Pipkin says the book is intended for "high intermediate" students but places no explicit emphasis on ESL students. It is therefore unclear whether "high intermediate" refers to proficient ESL learners or native speakers at high-school level. As grammar is rarely taught to this comprehensive degree in first language (L1) English classes, and the language used in the book is so straightforward and simple, the assumption is that *Destinations 2* will be most commonly used in ESL classrooms. Although the ambiguity regarding the intended students would not prove a difficulty for those who have already chosen this book, it may be a serious problem for teachers who are considering whether or not to use the book: They may instead choose a grammar textbook that is more obviously ESL oriented even though *Destinations 2* is a very useful text.

While the target students are likely to be ESL, this book would also be very useful for many native speakers at junior or high-school level, and it should be recommended to English teachers wanting to provide their students with knowledge of English structure. The book is printed in gray scale, which might prove dull through time if this book is the only course textbook, but the book's charts and tables are clear and the photographs are laid out attractively.

*Destinations 2: Grammar for Academic Success* strikes the often uneasy balance that exists in grammar texts between comprehensiveness and clarity. All but the most intractable of students will find this textbook accessible, straightforward, and challenging, and most teachers will appreciate the wealth of activities and resources that *Destinations 2* and its supporting materials provide.

## ***Top Notch 1***

Joan Saslow and Allen Ascher

White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, 2006.

**HAE-LIM LEE**

*California State University, Fullerton*

Classroom materials are one of the most important features for successful teaching and learning. As textbooks are a major source of teaching and learning in the classroom, a well-designed textbook can be crucial for student motivation. Choosing an appropriate textbook is especially significant in an ESL classroom, because learning a new language is never an easy task. One example of an effective textbook is *Top Notch 1*. This book is for adult and young adult learners of ESL at the beginning levels. Covering the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—*Top Notch 1* focuses particularly on listening and speaking skills. It also addresses vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This book is designed to teach communicative competence: the ability to communicate in English according to the situation, purpose, and roles of the participants. The book consists of a total of 10 units, and each unit contains four lessons. At the end of every unit, the book provides an achievement assessment scale to evaluate students' knowledge of each unit.

The main goal of the book is to prepare students to interact successfully and confidently with both native and nonnative speakers of English. This is attained through the teaching of English skills for everyday situations related to social life, work, and leisure. Moreover, the underlying philosophy of the book is that learning a second or foreign language is more rewarding, meaningful, and effective when the language is used for authentic communication. Based on this approach, the book presents students with natural and useful language both receptively and productively. The authenticity of the conversation models is the text's strongest feature and provides students an effective tool for learning. The book also has highly practical language such as bargaining for a lower price, asking for a restaurant check, or complaining when the air-conditioning in a hotel room does not work.

With respect to authenticity, the book also provides lots of realistic pictures with factually accurate and up-to-date information in each unit. The pictures in the book are very diverse and show various aspects of life in America, providing ESL learners with realistic pictures that expose them to the target culture. These visual aids may help the learners' understanding, and the teacher may use them as a springboard for further discussion. Tasks within activities in the book are mostly very authentic as well, including filling out a form, completing a chart, taking a survey, and having conversations with a partner. The last section of each unit contains pair- or group-work activities. While students practice what they have learned with their classmates, they can also practice applying their knowledge to a real situation. By completing these authentic tasks, students can prepare for situations that they may encounter outside the classroom.

Besides the authenticity of its content, the text also has the positive aspect of avoiding stereotypes by raising awareness of other cultures. The book

contains examples that are related not just to the US but also to other countries, such as China, Japan, South Africa, Korea, and France. To make second language (L2) learners avoid stereotypes, it is important to introduce information related to different cultures. By engaging with the information about various cultures in the text, ESL learners using *Top Notch 1* will be able to expand their awareness and understanding of other cultures as well as to learn how to communicate effectively.

One weakness of the book is how the lessons are organized. At the end of the book is a section titled Grammar Booster for practicing grammar. Each unit presents a grammar point and related exercises to support the understanding and use of appropriate expressions. However, because this grammar section is at the end of the book, the instructor and students will find themselves flipping back and forth to address the grammar points and to engage in the exercises. Because the section is not within the units or connected with a particular lesson, students may think the grammar exercises are not related to the units, and this may cause some confusion. The section for practicing grammar would be better placed at the end of each unit so that students can work on the grammar exercises that are related to the lesson they are learning.

In conclusion, teachers will find that *Top Notch* is generally very useful for teaching ESL learners to communicate because of the authentic materials provided in the text. However, teachers should be aware of the organization of the grammar section and its exercises when incorporating these in the lessons.

### ***Step Forward 1: Multilevel Activity Book***

J. Adelson-Goldstein and C. Mahdesian  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

**HYE-YOUNG LEE**

*California State University, Fullerton*

Selecting an appropriate textbook is an important factor in teaching. Well-organized textbooks give teachers a desired standard to guide their teaching. In general, ESL teachers spend much time using textbooks in class and students expect that the use of textbooks will help them achieve their goals in learning the language. *Step Forward 1* offers teachers the tools to provide beginning adult students with functional language that they can use immediately in their lives.

At the beginning of the textbook, the goals, objectives, and content are clearly defined and explained. The book has units on “survival skill” areas, including classroom, family and friends, home, neighborhood, daily routines, health, and jobs, which are critical topics for ESL students. When we consider that many low-level language learners may have limited educational backgrounds, these units become essential to introduce them to life skills and civic competencies by addressing the four skills of listening, speaking, reading,

and writing. In addition, the book deals with useful vocabulary and grammar. Considering students' needs and the level of students' proficiency, *Step Forward 1* has both positive and negative features.

This textbook has three positive aspects. First, its content is authentic. Each unit handles real-life issues that are relevant for all ESL adult learners, such as getting a job, making an appointment to see a doctor, and reading directions to operate machines. Every unit has a lesson for everyday conversation related to the topics. The lessons focus on authentic conversation with guided practice. Even though the level of students' proficiency is at a beginner level, they can still have opportunities to practice real situational conversations by completing the fill-in-the-gap conversations or repeating the scripts from the audiotapes provided with the book. In addition, the book provides a variety of literary genres adapted from newspapers, magazines, and real situations with appropriate pictures and drawings to engage the learners. The teacher will find the lessons and supportive material useful to motivate students to tackle communicative tasks in their daily lives.

Second, activities are offered with diverse practice opportunities. Exercises vary from matching and information gaps to class surveys. For example, students usually have difficulty understanding simple grammar points with only one lesson. In this case, activities facilitate the use of grammar rules by having students fill in the charts or having them look at and change the pictures connected with the grammatical points. In addition to these aspects of grammar, vocabulary activities are designed to help students guess and learn new vocabulary on their own. The textbook has different types of guided activities—for instance, circling the correct words and matching sentences. Through these activities, the students are able to compare two different words by guessing their meanings and finding the correct answers. In addition, the activities give students a chance to learn meaningful interactions with classmates by doing pair and group work, in which they can communicate orally with their peers.

Last, the textbook addresses cultural as well as language factors. Adult ESL learners come from many different backgrounds. Therefore, living in a target language culture is challenging for learners. With well-introduced cultural lessons, the book attempts to make their new culture as hospitable and easy to grasp as possible. As learning a language requires learning about the target culture, much of the content of *Step Forward 1* serves as a window on American culture.

For the most part, the textbook is easy to follow for both teachers and learners, and it is appropriate for the learners targeted by the authors. However, the directions are at times unclear, and grammar content is not always given enough explicit explanation. The grammar section for ESL students can prove difficult for many, especially adult learners who may have little or no prior classroom experience in the fundamentals of the structure of English. Compared to other lessons, the grammar sections are very brief and there appears to be a lack of strategies to encourage students to learn grammar in an enjoyable manner. Even though Adelson-Goldstein and Mahdesian recognize that most students desire to improve their social skills and to address their survival needs, a balance between structure and communicative activities is necessary for successful learning outcomes.

Teachers should also be aware that the real-life skill of mathematics is employed in some of the units, including activities that require calculating prices. A concern for addressing this aspect is indicated, as language learning and math activities may not always be mutually compatible for some learners.

*Step Forward 1* is best suited for instructors teaching beginning adult learners to learn real-world skills by means of engaging in authentic activities, rather than beginning students seeking to learn academic English reading and writing. The textbook also considers learners' cultural backgrounds, ages, and interests to stimulate their participation. Although the textbook has some disadvantages, its content matches the goals and objectives outlined by the authors, reflecting the needs of students at a beginning level of language proficiency. *Step Forward 1* generates not only a good source of teaching ideas for teachers but also a clear direction for ESL students' learning.

### ***Planning and Teaching Creatively Within a Required Curriculum for Adult Learners***

Anne Burnes and Helen de Silva Joyce (Eds.)

Alexandria, VA: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2007.

CLAIRE MCLAUGHLIN

*College of Southern Nevada*

Another semester is upon you and you find yourself facing the same textbook and curriculum you have taught for the last several semesters. You ask yourself how you can make this class beneficial, yet rewarding and interesting for your students, while still meeting the requirements of the curriculum. If you find yourself in this situation, you may want to read *Planning and Teaching Creatively Within a Required Curriculum for Adult Learners*, edited by Anne Burnes and Helen de Silva Joyce.

Burnes and Joyce's compilation of personal stories of changes in the English language learner (ELL) adult classroom span the globe from the US, Australia, Peru, and points between. These changes took place in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programs, as well as in a study skills program held during a college orientation week. Students were adults learning English as a second language or as a foreign language. Classrooms were on college and university campuses and in adult language schools and vocational schools.

Chapter 1 discusses the idea behind change and what drives teachers to promote it, whether in a classroom or a curriculum. Three scales of change—institutional change, component change, and classroom change—are defined. The chapter refers to which of the upcoming chapters deal with each of these situations, providing readers with clear examples of each of the three types of pedagogical change. Should these ideas of change be overwhelming and one is not sure where or how to begin, a flowchart outlining the process of making a change in the curriculum or the classroom is provided. The edi-

tors note when to seek permission and involve other colleagues as well as when to evaluate the outcome.

Chapters 2 through 13 are personal testimonies of changes ELL teachers made in their curriculums or classrooms, some of which eventually led to changes in their institution's ELL programs. It should be noted that none of the teachers in this book were members of a textbook-adoption committee of any kind. The motivation behind the change in each of these chapters was different and specific to each teacher's situation. Some teachers wanted a better way to address their students' learning styles. Some thought the existing curriculum was not effective in motivating their students to learn. Others thought that there was a disconnection between the chosen textbook and the set curriculum. Some wanted to try new methods in order to keep up with current practice. What all of the teachers shared was the desire to create a curriculum that would bring success relevant to their students' lives.

Each of these chapters begins with a concise summary of the specific curriculum and the reasons motivating the instigation of the changes. All of the chapters provide artifacts, including examples of student work, questionnaires, handouts, time frames, and schedules. These artifacts help to give the reader a clear idea of what was being changed and why it was a positive step. Many teachers discussed how they obtained permission from faculty and department chairs, something not to be overlooked when initiating a change. It was clear that the changes each teacher made did not happen overnight but were part of a process that took time and effort.

The strongest sections of the book are the evaluations of each change, which are discussed at the end of each chapter. These conscientious teachers discussed openly what went well, and what did not go as well as they had predicted. They examined what went wrong in instigating the changes they sought, and how they would modify their approach in future. Some teachers included in their evaluations how much time and energy it took to make changes, which had not been considered beforehand.

One possible negative point this book may have for some readers is that the stories may seem too idealistic. Each chapter has a fairly positive outcome and the reader may not get the entire picture of the effort these teachers had to endure to make their changes work. Another possible drawback is the scenarios in the book may not match those of readers' own situations, and therefore, readers may have to read this book with some imagination to apply it to their own circumstances.

Most of us can attest that change is not easy. Many may shy away from change at every opportunity. Others may embrace it like a long-lost friend. Two things are true about change; it is inevitable and it is an ongoing process. *Planning and Teaching Creatively Within a Required Curriculum for Adult Learners* gives 12 examples of adult ELL teachers' accepting the challenge of making a change because they thought it was best for their students. ESL teachers will find these stories inspiring and may benefit from these examples of how changes can help students become engaged participants in their own learning.



## ***Communication Highwire:***

### ***Leveraging the Power of Diverse Communication Styles***

Dianne Hofner Saphiere, Barbara Kappler Mikk, and Basma Ibrahim DeVries  
Yarmouth, ME: The Intercultural Press, 2005.

PIPER McNULTY

*De Anza College, Cupertino*

**C**ommunication *Highwire*, as the circus metaphor implies, explores the balancing act inherent in any intercultural interaction: how to remain true to oneself while exploring aspects of other styles, with a goal of achieving more effective communication. After decades of teaching and training across, and about, cultural differences, these three authors have found that labels such as “direct,” “low context,” or “polychronic,” while providing initial insights, are not sufficient for their purposes, and that a more “robust, and dynamic” (p. xi) analysis framework is needed. In addition, unlike most books on intercultural interactions, *Communication Highwire* moves beyond appreciation of cultural difference to suggest ways to leverage diverse styles for improved communication across cultures. Their model is additive, with a goal of expanding each individual’s communication-style repertoire. The book is divided into four sections: an introduction, five factors affecting communication style, a detailed breakdown of 16 specific styles, and an extensive collection of activities. The authors return throughout the book to the ongoing, often contentious relationship between two businessmen, Mike and Tanakasan, who struggle to understand each other’s behaviors, articulate their own goals and preferences, try each other’s styles, and ultimately work together productively. Examples from many other cultures and contexts are also used to illustrate the concepts and strategies throughout the book, drawing on the authors’ extensive intercultural experience, both professional and personal.

Saphiere, Mikk, and DeVries explore communication across cultures from different client needs and perspectives, and they argue persuasively that successful communication requires a combination of styles. The best coauthored books present a mixture of ideas, experiences, and analysis and we are the richer for these authors’ extensive collaboration. Each chapter, and the themes that carry throughout the text, appear to be the result of extensive discussion, reflection, and collaboration. The book is full of engaging, highly readable examples, discussion prompts, and skills activities, which take the reader well beyond the obvious and the “common sense” of communication theory. Occasionally the sentences get a bit wordy, but the writing is clear and cogent throughout, and the authors do an excellent job of selectively substituting everyday terms where field-specific jargon could simply distract and frustrate the reader.

The book also stands out for its gentle reminders to consider multiple perspectives, to “hold ... individual goals loosely enough to hear, accept and more fully understand each other’s goals” (p. 79). In addition, the analysis checklists are exceptionally thorough. For example, most intercultural communication (IC) texts simply state that in some cultures one should avoid eye contact with authority figures, yet we all know that eye-contact rules are not that simple. These authors list four different descriptors of eye contact, and while such

detailed analyses might seem more than the average ESL/EFL student needs, or can handle, adults in a second-culture context often struggle to adjust their communication behaviors to be more effective with their new interlocutors, and they are often very aware of fine nuances of style. Such students are usually more than ready to embrace this depth of analysis, because they want to understand why their interactions across cultures do not always go as intended.

Of particular interest to TESOL members will be the detailed analyses of functional language. Students trained to analyze miscommunication as these authors suggest will be at a significant advantage when discussing, negotiating, persuading, critiquing, or receiving feedback, skills that can come into play in academic contexts, the workplace, when renting an apartment, or opening a bank account. Also addressed are idea presentation, turn taking, expectations of communication process, use of emotion, permeability of new ideas, apologies, requests, praise and disagreement, feedback, and humor, among others. Language for describing details of both vocal characteristics and nonverbal behaviors are also provided. Making this global range of styles explicit is of great benefit to instructors and students alike.

The authors also emphasize that no individual will be predictably direct, or emotionally expressive, or quick to touch others in all contexts (to name just a few), but that communication styles are a situational tendency, providing a link between behavior and underlying intentions. To leverage our understanding of others' styles, they present a four-step method: (a) reflecting, (b) analyzing, (c) discussing, and (d) deciding. While these steps might seem easy to carry out, discussing and deciding are not found in most IC literature, and the authors' engaging analysis of the ongoing relationship between Mike and Tanaka-san helps instructors and clients develop their own version of the suggested analysis strategies.

The book is such a rich source of information and analysis tools to seem, at times, overwhelming, but the outline format and use of charts allow the reader to skim the chapters' subtopics, selecting the specific communication styles or functions that are most applicable to their client/student population. As for the activities, we have all read step-by-step instructions of skill-building activities and wondered whether we could achieve the outcomes promised by the author. Intercultural and diversity training can be particularly idiosyncratic and context specific, making it difficult for others to duplicate their success. However, the activities presented here are easy to envision, and the tips and suggested adaptations allay concerns that the exercises are too dependent on the original facilitator's approach. In addition, the relatively large font, line spacing, and the wide margins leave plenty of room for underlining and notes.

*Communication Highwire* is an excellent resource for ESL/EFL instructors whether or not they use the activities in their own classrooms, as the tools provided may help them recognize where, and why, their own interactions with their clients, of any age or level, have gone awry, and what may be causing disconnects in their classrooms. The authors explore culturally different communication styles with depth, clarity, and insight. *Communication Highwire* would be a useful supplement for teacher-training programs and a valuable addition to any ESL/EFL instructor or trainer's library, no matter what the level or context of instruction. *Communication Highwire: Leveraging the Power of Diverse Communication Styles* is a gem!

## ***Catalyst 2: Writing From Reading***

Marianne Brems

Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2008.

**JEFFREY WELLIVER**

*Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo*

Writing teachers are ever in search of effective materials that are both linguistically appropriate and well structured for effective use in the classroom. To reach their students and engage them critically, teachers need look no further than *Catalyst 2*. It is a well-thought-out, theme-oriented textbook with readings that are sophisticated enough to hold intermediate ESL students' attention, encourage their participation, and prepare them for academic writing.

This text is made up of eight chapters centered on the sustained theme of the immigrant experience in the US. Each chapter, divided into two parts, covers a unique aspect of the immigrant experience. The first part of each chapter begins with prereading, schemata-raising pictures, and questions for students to discuss in groups. Next there is a reading followed by discussion questions, vocabulary-building exercises, and composition-analysis questions. Students are then given prewriting questions to be answered in pairs and a writing assignment. After writing, there are grammar exercises followed by peer-review activities and revision exercises. In the second part of each chapter the process begins again—reading, comprehension, vocabulary, composition analysis. However, in Part 2, there are two readings. The first is followed by a scaffolding activity called Making Connections. In this section, students are asked to look at the text from Part 1 alongside the first text of Section 2 in order to uncover relationships between the two readings in a way that approximates the research experience of comparing and contrasting texts. After this, there is a third and final reading, followed by composition analysis, prewriting questions, writing prompts, grammar exercises, and finally rewriting exercises.

The readings are largely drawn from authentic texts from a variety of sources. Within each chapter, the readings are thematically bound and encourage students to look at the issues from multiple angles. There are three essential types of readings: personal experience, extending the topic (a related reading or a continuation of the first reading), and academic reading. These build upon each other and provide an opportunity for students to gain understanding of the subject matter in an ordered way. Students can build up knowledge and background information that they can use later in their writing assignments. The academic readings will challenge students' comprehension, but they remain accessible as there are vocabulary keys for more difficult words and the texts are often supported with graphs, diagrams, and other images. Through a variety of reading types, and a similar variety in writing exercises, students are exposed to many kinds of writing, including personal experience, opinion, descriptive essays, and cause and effect.

The ordering of the text allows students to focus on the content of readings and writings before they focus on grammar: Two grammar points are treated per chapter, and grammar feedback is built into the Composition Evaluation Sheet provided in the Appendix.

There is a full range of exercises: exercises for students to do on their own, pair exercises, group activities, prereading, postreading, prewriting, postwriting, grammar focus, vocabulary building, and composition analysis. The activities are well designed to generate discussions that elicit students' feelings and thoughts. There are also exercises that encourage students to explore their senses and their cultural values in comparison to American values.

The composition-analysis sections are particularly useful to show students how to look at writing, and, by extension, how to self-edit and to give feedback on the writing of others. This is then put into practice as students are expected to review each others' work for components studied in that part's composition-analysis section.

The teacher will find this text is accessible to students. The chapters are uniform in structure and contain grammar and composition explanations that are easy to follow along with checklists based on the points being studied. Another attractive feature is that it could serve as a stand-alone text, virtually complete on its own with appendices for use throughout the writing process.

One issue that could use improvement is the range of prewriting activities. Though there is one prewriting activity that has students discuss their ideas in pairs, it seems that this would be a good place to introduce brainstorming, listing, and clustering. There is no coverage of these types of prewriting strategies. Also, there is no time built in for the sharing of work beyond the peer-review process. These shortcomings, though, could easily be compensated for with minimal supplementary materials and class time. Activities could also be extended through activities available online at the Thomson Heinle Web page.

This text deals entirely with issues of special interest to immigrants. It could, therefore, be less accessible to international students. Even so, its content is broad enough and varied in scope (discrimination, stereotypes, family structure) that it would most likely hold the attention of international students as well as that of their immigrant peers.

This text should be highly recommended to any teacher working with intermediate students who are just beyond paragraph writing and beginning essay writing. This text, unique in its sustained-content approach, has as its central issue a topic that is controversial in U.S. politics at present. Thus, it is a stimulating text that allows students, immigrant or not, to explore issues important to the debate and gives them the opportunity to explore their feelings and voice their opinions on issues relevant to life outside of the classroom. The organization of the text brings in background knowledge and ideas, encourages dialogue and discussion, promotes improvement in grammar, vocabulary, and composition, involves students with each others' work, and provides opportunities for both teacher and peer feedback. *Catalyst 2* successfully positions ESL writing in a highly communicative framework.