

Teaching and learning academic writing: Narratives of future destinations

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Focus

Qualitative project relating content and form of AW portfolios to

- Student 'destinations', 'disciplinary communities' and 'imagined communities'
- The need of more specificity in creating 'disciplinary identities' (Coffin, 2013) for 'professional membership' (Gunawardena & Wilson, 2012)
- The role of the 'portfolio approach' in engaging students with discourses needed for future destinations

Contents

Introduction: Generic & discipline-specific literacy performances

Context of study & participants

Literature backgrounds:

- Imagined communities
- Literacy practices of future discourse communities;
- Characteristics of AW pedagogy

Methodology – Findings – Discussion - Conclusions

Investigation: How AW programs in EAL engage students to invest in assessed portfolios where they analyse/ create text types characteristic of their destinations

SS needs: to achieve outcomes of course & to write for their future disciplinary/ imagined communities

Pittaway (2004): investment-focused pedagogy acknowledges students “for the complexity underlying their motivations, desires, and hopes for the future” (p.216)

Norton (2000): “investment” references identity & desire

Generic & discipline-specific literacy performances

“Discourse communities”:

Borg (2003): share goals and use written communication to engage in repertoire-sharing

Swales (1998): employ genres, each with their own fields of language, characteristic of the community

Genre of discourse communities comprise ‘teachable’ texts and practices (skills, strategies, conventions, ways of structuring, cultural understandings, ways of being)

‘**Disciplinary communities**’ (Coffin, et al., 2013)

Generic & discipline-specific literacy performances

“Imagined communities”

Engaging students of AW in producing texts encountered in their future destinations involves enquiring into these communities

Since they are desired, not current, discourse communities, they can be considered “imagined communities” (Anderson 1983; Kanno & Gao 2008)

Generic & discipline-specific literacy performances

“As they progress through the university, students are often expected to produce texts that increasingly approximate the norms and conventions of their chosen disciplines, with this expectation peaking at the level of postgraduate study”.

“Students have greater control over their writing if they are helped by lecturers to develop an explicit awareness of how different disciplines employ different text types and how these text types construct and represent knowledge (both through their text structure and through their use of register)”.

(Coffin, et al., *Teaching academic writing*, 2003, pp.2, 46)

Generic & discipline-specific literacy performances

We ask: how pedagogy for teaching AW that considers imagined discourse communities enhances investment via creation/ recreation of discourses of future destinations

We demonstrated: the benefits of portfolio-based pedagogy and assessment for learners' written academic literacy while providing spaces to negotiate cross-cultural and individual voices within the conventions of the discourse (Romova & Andrew 2011)

We continue: the argument that portfolios provide multiple opportunities for rehearsing a variety of text types, creating an "album of literacy performances" (Ferris & Hedgcock 2005, p.322) - ideally to suit future destinations

Context of study & participants

Academic Writing, level 5 at a tertiary institution:

Details: 14-week; year 1; Dip Eng (Adv) & degree credit bearing course; Auckland tertiary institute; 6hrs per week over 3 sessions; performance-based portfolio-assessed

Goals: EAL learners meet academic demands of tertiary study in chosen fields

Target communities: SS develop abilities to write discourses aligned with present & future majors: Nursing, Business Studies, ECE, Computer Science, Communication, Medicine, Statistics, Social Practice

41 participants over 2 semesters, in 2 cohorts each semester: 18-39; 14M-27F; China, HK, Korea, Japan, Russia, Vietnam, Somalia, Ethiopia, Israel, Tonga, Nepal, Malaysia,

Context of study & participants

Portfolios

- weekly multi-draft formative written tasks
- seven text types from critique to expository and argumentative essay
- micro- and macro-level writing & learning
- instruction of text features so students “can better understand how to make a piece of writing more effective and appropriate to the communicative purpose” (Reppen 2002, p.322)
- tailored to communicative purposes of imagined and desired communities (Borg 2003; Ramanathan & Kaplan 2000)
 - Via types of text (after Flowerdew 2000; Hinkel 2002)
 - Via choice of topics for texts, e.g. reading texts from future career choices

Context of study & participants

Features of portfolios in AW

Granville and Dison (2005): processes of multi-drafting & reflectivity work within the context of portfolios

Multi-drafting: collection, reflection, selection, and ongoing peer and teacher feedback (Hamp-Lyons & Condon 2000)

Reflexivity: students' reflections on each draft feed back into the teaching and point to a formative function (see Lam & Lee 2009)

Pedagogical interventions: Teacher monitoring & conferencing, peer review, collaborative group work

Literature Review: Imagined communities

“Imagined communities” (Anderson 1983): Students imagine themselves as members of future academic, local, national or professional communities using the language of these communities in specific ways characteristic of them

“Investments” in future selves (Norton 2000; Murphey, Chen & Chen 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda 2011)

Language socialisation: “Learning to write is part of becoming socialized to the academic community – finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it” (Silva, 1990, p.17)

Literacy practices

- Self-reflective awareness of one's own generic texts (Kathpalia & Heah 2008; Woodward 1998)
- Academic literacies developing within such texts (Johns 1995)
- Learning through peer feedback (Rollinson 2005; Zhao 2010)
- Listenership during tutor monitoring (Farr 2001; Ferris & Hedgcock 2005)
- Openness to written feedback at micro- and macro-levels (Hamp-Lyons 2006; Hyland & Hyland 2006; Leki 2006; Weigle 2002)
- Enhanced understanding of paraphrasing (Keck 2005), self-editing (Ferris 2005; Vickers & Ene 2006) or brainstorming (Rao 2007)

Characteristics of AW pedagogy

- Developing **individual learners' understandings** of a range of generic text types from future 'imagined' discourse communities (Ramanathan & Kaplan 2000)
- Incorporating a **critical** stance: Genre is *not* monolithic or utopian; *is* ideologically-freighted and *is* dialogic
- Considering Carolyn Miller's (1984) 'rhetorical' view: **Genres incorporate social actions & reflect understandings about participation in communities** with "cultural rationality" (p.165)
- Writing as **social practice** as well as process (Coffin, et al., 2013)

Characteristics of AW pedagogy

- Focussing on unpacking the generic features of authentic texts belonging to students' desired disciplinary and professional futures (Hinds 1987; Reppen 2002) in terms of the *action* they aim to achieve (ESP meets rhetoric)
- Viewing portfolios as sites for practicing membership of imagined communities by highlighting applications of literacy practices of those communities (Johns 1997, 2002; Hyland 2000)

Swales (1998): 'Communities' as systems where the multiple beliefs and practices of text users overlap and intersect

Hyland (2002): "The teaching of key genres is seen as a means of helping learners gain access to ways of communicating that have accrued cultural capital in particular communities" (p.125)

Methodology

Summary: Reconstructed narratives of an intake's learning gains within an AW programme

Data collection: Focus groups, weeks 2 and 15, with guided questions; triangulated with reflections on learning tasks to construct narratives of destination (in process, narratives as data)

Analysis of narrative: Thematic (Sandelowski 1995) to embody authentic, reflective, evaluative insights of real learner experience and bring out "indigenous themes" (Patton 1990)

Ethics: All students formally agreed to participate and for their words to be used. All names are pseudonyms.

Methodology

Focus group week 2: Reasons for enrolling; challenges of writing academic texts; the future imagined communities; writing skills perceived as needed for future studies; ways of using writing in the future

Focus group week 15: Impacts of regular writing, feedback and follow-up in target genres, learning about structure and discourse;

- impact of drafting & redrafting process; portfolio assessment;
- the need to include any other text types or skills into the portfolio;
- how useful is the academic style of writing to participants' future needs;
- whether the style of writing taught on the course is culturally different from students' expectations
- building literacies, e.g. editing, proofreading, following up corrections
...on students' imagined future lives

Findings

Three broad groups of themes:

- Writing academic texts in target genres enables investment in AW due to the texts' connections with future discourse communities/ destinations
- Micro- and macro-level learning from the generic text types rehearses practices found in students' imagined communities
- Planning and organising are literacy practices recognised as valuable for learners' long-term futures

The chance to write authentic text types enhances learner investment

Key cultural capital beyond “expanding my academic vocabulary” & “improving my grammar”, writing “in a web” or “in the western way”

Future focus:

- e.g. to practice medicine
- to write reports for future studies
- to close the gap between real and imagined professional and social interactions

The chance to write authentic text types enhances learner investment

Mabel (business focus): literacy practices of AW (“skills” & “conventions”) applicable to a business context (her imagined community)

Her creation of a business-style paragraph made her feel she had worked “usefully”

Irma (ECE): “I think this type of writing [can help] my future study”

William (Nursing): “What I am learning to do here is related to what I want to do. I am getting ready for further study – looking into the future”

Learning from text types helps to engage learners

Narratives of students targeting imagined communities and the discourses characterising them:

Irma (ECE): “restructuring the writing to suit ‘academic writing’ ” and “finding the right words for the topic”

Farah (Business): “developing the thinking skills needed to fit in with learning expectations of the genre”

Sue (ECE): “understanding the logic of the expected order – topic sentence and conclusion” useful for ECE

Emma (Computer Sciences): “thinking in a logical and chronological order while focusing on sentence structure too” are strategies she will require “next year”

Learning from text types helps to engage learners

Yuichi (Royal New Zealand Police College): Academic writing genre “brings its own stress, so you can’t merely focus on vocabulary...I need more logic, as in academic reports.”

Miwa (ECE): “For the future I want to learn not only this argumentative essay but also other different genre of writing”

Emily (Business): “How to improve in the future: copy some good phrases while reading, rehearse and practice them...There is not a shortcut to improve my English in a sudden way, but at least I have got some strategies to make it look better”

Learning from text types helps to engage learners

AW pedagogy impacts language socialisation

Nine students: genre-focused approach emphasising conventions enhances awareness of texts of target discourse communities

Narratives

Farat (Business): Starting with the thesis and then writing topic-based sentences helps those wanting to write academically in other subjects

- understanding of generic conventions enables functioning in future imagined communities

Emma (Computer Science): Understanding the “conventions of structure affect the coherence of an essay and give it its overall quality”

- a stronger focus on genre enables better academic texts

Planning skills impact learning gains for future study

Narratives of 41 participants viewing literacy practices of AW as capital for future contexts

Vinna (Nursing): Prewriting and outlining “control my ideas when I write my essay – very central”.

- Gestures to an enabling discourse feature

Jenny (Business): Outlining: “Above all, outlining is the best thing for me ... and I feel that if I prepare the outline well and in detail, then the time of writing an essay gets shorter.”

- Claims applying literacy practices better equip her

Planning skills impact learning gains for future study

Emma (Computer Science): Planning and organising: “The process of AW (pre-writing and outlining) helped me to organise ideas simply and start to write easily”

- Identifies skills of successful students

Kirma (ECE): Textual organization: “the process – pre-writing, outlining and so on – controls my ideas when I write my essay for Academic Writing and for Education”

- Relates “a skill [she] will reapply in her later career”

Planning skills impact learning gains for future study

Ella (Nursing): “Brainstorming ... is the cornerstone that makes your whole essay link well. AW for IELTS and TOEFL is different from AW for nursing. The idea of logical development of text is different”

- investment in AW enhances prospects for nursing

Helen (ECE): Outlining: “A good outline is guarantee of a good draft. I have learnt the writing process in AW and I will apply it in my studies in Education”

- explicitly looks to future community

Future imagined communities

Sadya (nursing): saw improvement for her future nursing course

Yohana (health science): saw improvement after a previous course in NZ due to speaking opportunities

“My auntie died from cancer – because there was not enough medical care. So I am planning to be a surgeon – not only to operate on people, but also to find the reason of cancer and to find treatment for it. AW will help me write reports of my discoveries + research skills”.

Dan (psychology): goal to study at University.

Thorne (MB): “It is important to learn to write, particularly to summarise”.

Future imagined communities

Esson (Statistics): “I plan to go to Uni next year, and I’ve never been trained in writing academic things. My Chinese friend told me Chinese students have a lot of difficulty at Uni in writing academic things. I chose statistics because I need a good job in the future. Secondly, there are fewer assignments in statistics”.

Michael (Computing): “In every subject, there is AW though they differ from one another”.

Tala (Social Practice): “I need to improve my AW as at tertiary level you are going to do a lot of writing, and my writing is not up to standard”.

Jad (Architecture): “Writing is my interest as I was a journalist in the university newspaper in China. So I’d like to write articles. My major’s architecture. When we do models, we don’t need AW, but I like it – that’s my interest”.

Future imagined communities

- **Nicky (Career in insurance):** “I have come here to study only English so that I could come up in my job. My position is supervisor and I need to write to insurance companies. Underwriter”.
- **Kenny (Interpreting/Translation):** “Actually, I don’t like AW – it’s too hard for me, but I want to go onto further study. I am thinking of becoming an interpreter for courts and hospitals. And good writing influences speaking. They go together: writing and speaking”.
- **Wanli (career in nursing):** “If you want to write a good assignment, you need to do AW. For your AW, speaking well is not enough. I have worked in a private hospital for several years. Sometimes, my letter to the pharmacy or the doctor came back as they needed to confirm what exactly I needed. So AW is vital for us, especially for this kind of professional work”.

Skills for destination

- **Thorne: Summarising & paraphrasing.** In business studies, “I have to read and summarise a lot of documents. It may help me collect the main idea and understand the whole thing”.
- **Yoh: writing essays:** “At Uni, it’ll be busy and I’ll have to do a lot of research and reference the sources... (these) can be useful in other types of writing: report writing and case study”.
- **Dan:** “The structuring of an essay and organising it in an academic way. It’s like a new language I need to learn to speak to meet the expectations”.
- **Sadya:** Essays, researching for nursing, referencing, enough vocab to write essays

Skills for destination

Yoh: “At Uni, we are studying with native speakers, and they expect us to be as confident/competent as native speakers”.

Sadya: “I find it difficult to start. Once you start, it is easy to continue, but the main point is where and how we are gonna start. And we have to write a specific idea”.

Sharon: “If I can write a good essay, I can write anything”. “What I find hard is referencing and editing. And the focus is on analysing, evaluating, reflecting”.

Dan: “The main obstacle is to match your level with the lecturer expectation”.

Michael: “ I need to learn how to brainstorm... I have a lot of ideas, but I don't know how to organise them”.

Skills for destination

Tala: “I need to write logically and academically. Before enrolling in this course, I used to discuss more than one idea in a paragraph... I think the difference between English and Chinese AW is in **the logic**. I find English AW more logical: the topic and supporting sentences – **tells the reader** what the essay wants to say from the structure”.

Jad: “Good writing skills lead to the **readers wanting to read your articles** – this is part of the writing skills, this is very important... I want to write a book, I want other people to like my book. It is very important how you choose different things in your book or article”.

Wanli: “I am a registered nurse and got my registration 6 years ago, but I have complaints from families... That’s why I’ve come to this course. It is not only the speaking, but the AW that is going to help me as **we must connect with doctors, or other nurses, or with the community, or a specialist** from somewhere else and hear from them”.

Skills for destination

Nicky: I need **summarising** for my future career... I want to do fluent writing, without thinking too much of the correct structure, grammar, etc.”

Esson: Another writing skill I need to learn is **how to write complex but clear sentences**. I’ve been trying to write very complex sentences. Grammatically, they correct I think..., but I want to write sentences **in a native way**. The Westerners and the Asians have different ways of thinking about the same topic. So when we are trying to express one thing, we use different sentences. I mean when I am writing something, I am not doing writing – I doing translating. I translate Chinese ideas in my mind into English. But when I see articles on the topic written by natives, I find there are better ways to express the ideas. So I want to change my written sentence styles.”

Skills for destination

Thorne: “I will go back to my country to work for my father’s insurance company. I will have to write a lot of reports and make presentations. I need to be more confident. Writing is going to influence my ability to speak to people too”.

Sadya: “It’s hard to communicate with a patient. If my speaking is good, it will be easy to understand me. I need writing in my future studies”.

Yoh: To research and to write reports on my discoveries for cancer treatment.

Dan: “AW reflects the way we think, so it helps the person to develop as a critical thinker, so it’s a good tool to have in the future... You have to develop your thought, you have to deliver your thinking, to organise, to edit. So it helps you to reflect on yourself... In writing you have more time to develop what you want to say, to research and to have more thinking about your ideas than in speaking on the spot”. “It comes back to the role of education in the world. It is to increase awareness of people, to kill diseases and to help improve our lives”.

Yoh: “When we write, it helps us to develop relationships with people”.

Skills for destination

Rachel: “We’ll need to use formal language to make professors happy”.

Ailsa: “Researching the topic and references are important for a dissertation”.

Ning: “Paraphrasing & summarising is good for everybody, including those who are working. You have to report to your boss”.

Wanli (nurse): “Academic style of writing is useful for my academic documentations. It’s good not only for writing, but for speaking too”.

Skills for destination

Ailsa: “This course is more like **preparation for further study** (e.g. paraphrase and summarise) than writing essays for IELTS”.

Bella: “I think it’s useful because it’s assignments instead of just an exam. I think **it’s good preparation for my future study**. I had no idea what is AW before I took this course”.

Tala (wk 14): “Now I don’t expect the teacher to hold my hand. I need to do self-study and to develop myself in order to progress. It’s culturally different from what I expected – more **independence and autonomy** in the process”.

Kenny: “ AW is not very useful for my future, but I’ve learned **logical thinking...** Thinking critically and speaking logically, developing ideas – that’s the benefit”.

Discussion

The acts of learning to write point to the process of becoming socialized to future, imagined communities – ‘destinations’

- Learners “in continual discussion, analysis and evaluation of their processes and progress as writers” (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2003, p. 15)
- Evidence of enhanced reflective capacity (Kathpalia & Heah, 2008)
- Evolving literacy practices embedded in academic writing (Adamson, 1992; Johns, 1995)
- Awareness of macro-level, discourse-level thinking (Hyland, 2003, 2005)
- Attention on such literacy practices as outlining and paraphrasing (Keck, 2005), self-editing (Ferris, 2005) and brainstorming (Rao, 2007)
- AW “[enables] learners to find out what is expected (in their future imagined communities) and then try to approximate it” (Silva, 1990, p. 17).

Discussion

Emerging understandings

- Students' needs are connected to being and becoming members of future discourse and disciplinary communities
- Students' aspirations accord with understandings of imagined communities as places of the heart and mind that reference identity (Norton & Gao 2008)
- An AW program needs to consider learner investment, i.e. their next destination; desired identities and future selves.

Discussion

Is EAP the future?

“As the provision of writing instruction has increased, higher level courses in academic writing have been developed. In some cases these courses link disciplinary lecturers with writing specialists to focus on disciplinary forms of writing, as in ‘learning communities” (Coffin, et al., 2013, p. 6).

- Balance of multi-modality of AW and discipline-specificity of EAP

Conclusions

First-year degree level adult learners report:

- Benefits from creating text types characteristic of their imagined communities - destinations
- Increased understanding of discursive and generic features of academic texts necessary for participating in future discourse communities

Conclusions

- A discourse community-based pedagogical approach (as opposed to a genre-based one) can impact on learners' investments in an AW program
- Such a program highlights the literacy practices characteristic of future discourse communities
- We a pedagogical approach emphasises the theoretical link between the pedagogical use of portfolios as “albums” of “individualised” genre-focused texts and the learners' future, imagined, disciplinary communities (Ramanathan & Kaplan, 2000) - and destinations.

**LIFE IS NOT ABOUT THE DESTINATION
IT'S ABOUT THE JOURNEY**



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Further reading: Romova, Z., & Andrew, M. (2011). Teaching and assessing academic writing via the portfolio: benefits for learners of English as an additional language. *Assessing Writing*, 16(2), 112- 122.