Faces and Voices
An academic writing course at the centre of learning

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“Standards are Falling!”

The deficiency discourse
Background

4000 level course: Research and Writing
All students: all disciplines
all linguistic, ethnic, national backgrounds accredited

US influence:
Liberal Arts – General Education courses, discipline specialisation later
3000 level start – but decreasing
“Freshman Composition” heritage

Changing intake
Language

“More language is needed…….”

International students > English for Academic Purposes
‘Home’ students > writing support, study skills

Trivialisation, marginalisation (Wingate 2015)
Language?

“Academic language is....no one’s mother tongue”
Bourdieu and Passeron 1994

“Academic writing? It’s like a foreign language.”
Harrison Chadwick, 2010
Language – culture - identity

Dodd 1998

Layers of ‘culture’

Inner layer  outer layer

Values  communication
patterns
Beliefs  >  behaviours
Worldview  practices
Language – culture - identity

Discourse practices – patternning, use of language
Academic literacy practices

“Discourses are connected with displays of an identity” Gee 1990:155

“Academic success means representing yourself in a way that is valued by your discipline, adopting the values, beliefs and identities which academic discourses embody.” Hyland 2006: 22

The academic literacies approach ...."views student writing and learning at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skill or socialisation” Lea and Street 1998:160

A cultural leap, an identity shift
transformations

Mismatches of expectations:
No understanding of the research process, weak/no argument, inadequate reading, no critical thinking, inadequate citations, non-academic language

Students go……..

From: receivers, absorbers of knowledge
To: surveyors, analysts, evaluators and constructors of knowledge

The course: analyses, articulates, explores, plays with the facets of this transformation
Language? Writing? Research?

Writing forefronted – the visible product

But writing is underpinned by:

....finding texts, focussing on a topic, reading, evaluating, selecting, organising, ordering, prioritising, designing, expressing, presenting...
transformations

New ways of knowing
saying
doing
being

“What’s new? It’s not the content but the doing it.”
Richard Pawulski- Saunders May 2014
Content and methodology of the 4000 level Research and Writing course

First part:
Producing a Literature Review
1. Overview of research processes
2. Reading academic texts
3. Processing research
4. Documenting research – annotated bibliography
5. Planning, designing, ordering
6. Integrating research
7. Academic conventions
Content and methodology of the 4000 level Research and Writing course

Second part:
Producing an argument paper
9. Argument
10. Perspectives on research
11. Writing up: cohesion and coherence
12. Writing up: convention and good practice
13. Writing up: register and style
14. Writing up: revision, editing
In more detail.....

Epistemological shifts.....

Citations – knowledge as dynamic, contested, culturally constructed, historically situated, geographically contingent, negotiated

Exercise “do the following need to be acknowledged?”
examples like “the number of cars in Beijing has increased”
“global warming is the result of human activity”
Epistemological shifts…..

1. ‘Processing research’
Making notes

Framed as: a way of representing ideas etc to yourself
engagement
appropriation
internalisation
(re-) creation
Reading and making notes

“It really helps with involvement with the text, but I am always unsure with my notes. How do I organise them? Have I really understood the text? Have I interpreted it right? Have I got what I need?”

Sally Bestor May 2014
Epistemological shifts

2. Annotated bibliography

Summary
Evaluation
Reflection / location

“getting away from the sponge model of learning”
Williams 2013, 36

“The annotated bibliography was hard, but it was the breakthrough” Kelsey Miller May 2016
Epistemological shifts......

3. The literature review

An account of how ‘knowledge’ about a topic has been constructed
negotiated
contested
Epistemological shifts

4. Choosing a topic, specifying a focus

The perspective that any topic has a hinterland, a heritage

any ‘current affairs’ topic
has a history, lineage

Students discover this, locate themselves in the landscape
Methodology

1. Observation of what the experts do
   What are the practices? ‘move analysis’ (Swales 1990)

2. Analysis of lexical and grammatical features
   how is it realised? What linguistic resources are involved?

3. Co-production
   How do we put it into operation? Exploration, experimentation, reflection

4. Independent production
   how do I use these resources to represent my own meaning?

(Wingate 2015, the Sydney School – Systemic-functional linguistics, genre analysis, academic literacies)

Underpinned by reflection, the “de-naturalisation of the object” (Blommaert 2008, 139) de-mystification
Methodology

Gimenez and Thomas, 2015
Framework for pedagogy

Accessibility
Criticality
Visibility
Socialisation or Acculturation?

**Socialisation**
- acquisition of practices, ‘skills’
- apprenticeship
  
- can be normative, prescriptive
- on its own > “colonised students”? (Gee 1990 145)

**Acculturation**
- learning
- reflection, self-reflection
- meta-knowledge
- resistance
Benefits and Complexities

Negatives

students:
  compartmentalise, no application across courses
  already ‘know’
  artificial, detached from a discipline

Teaching staff:
  regard the course as a panacea, too high expectations
  misconstrue the focus of the course – deficiency
  discourse, ‘skills’, ‘language’ ‘study skills’ (visibility of
  expertise in doing citations)
  lack of common vocabulary
Benefits and complexities

Ways forward......
In the classroom
frame the course to students as transformative
reflection and self reflection, develop meta-knowledge
links to other courses and beyond
use of student texts
use of faculty texts
quote teaching staff

Joining a discourse community
Benefits and complexities

Ways forward.......  
With colleagues

class visits and talks (apprenticeship)  
information, communication, commonality of aims  
development of a common vocabulary  
materials - influence goes both ways

talk and echo

Martin Brown’s instructions to history students: state the argument, give a structure, specify theoretical approaches....
Benefits and complexities

Ways forward......

Institutional

name (NEVER “English”)
raise profile - research
Does it work?

External examiners:
“the work I have seen from Richmond’s International Journalism and Media students demonstrates a very good grasp of the key disciplines of academic writing”
Andy Chatfield, external examiner, 2015

Observations
Proficiency at post-graduate level
Student course evaluations: usefulness
Does it work?

Evaluation of the course:

Student evaluations *(majority found it useful)*
Long term evaluations
Case studies *(before and after)*
Finally……

From a ‘discourse of deficiency’

To ‘A Discourse of Transformation’
References


References continued...


