Working with departments to improve student writing: *Thinking Writing* initiatives at Queen Mary, University of London

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Overview

- Our teaching context
- 2 examples from UG medical degrees:
  - Co-teaching
  - Materials
  - Questions of power & identity
- Reflections on practice
Our Context:
From Writing in the Disciplines to Thinking Writing

- Cornell’s influence
- Queen Mary & the WiD project
- *Thinking Writing*
Our Context: Thinking Writing

- From individual module to programme level
- For both L1 and L2 students
- ‘Developmental’ rather than ‘Deficit’ model
- Placing writing centre stage
- ‘Writing to learn’ and ‘learning to write’
- Close partnership with subject specialists
- Close analysis of subject-specific text types and requirements
- Co-teaching in the discipline

- A ‘cottage industry’
  - TW concerns as ‘peripheral to the emerging agenda’…?
  - ‘An industry where the creation of products and services is home-based, rather than factory-based. … products and services created by cottage industry are often unique and distinctive given the fact that they are usually not mass-produced…
Our Context: two examples from our teaching

- 2\textsuperscript{nd} year medical students
- SAQs

- 4\textsuperscript{th} year medical students on iBSc
- Research project

1. Finding time
2. Co-teaching

Teaching materials:
- Analysing question types
- Analysis of a sample of students’ SAQs with tutor feedback and comment
- Language awareness (e.g. the use of nominalisation)

Teaching materials:
- Analysing BJSM research articles
- Language awareness (e.g. coherence and cohesion)
- Collaborative writing and peer reviewing
- A series of discussions on identity and power
Insights from Academic Literacies

**Lea and Street** (1998): models of student writing + approaches to researching student writing
- Student writing as a social practice, as ideologically driven and contested.
- Focus on students’ negotiation of conflicting literacy practices viewed at the level of epistemology and identities; institutions as sites of discourses and power; switching with regard to linguistic practices etc.

**Lillis and Scott** (2007): a field of enquiry
- ‘A critical ethnographic gaze’
- ‘A transformative stance’

**Lillis** (2003): ‘Dialogue as something to struggle for’ and an approach to academic writing that acknowledges ‘… the partial nature of any text and hence the range of potential meanings…’

Pedagogical implications?
What do these images suggest about power and identity in this context?
Negotiating status and identity in the discipline...

Examples of activities:

- Freewriting on their identity as writers/researchers
- Authorship order in BJSM research articles
- The process of peer review
- The positions of writing in the discipline
What came up in the discussions....

- The hierarchy of author order mirrored the institutional hierarchy
- Student researcher as ‘cheap labour’
- Politics of peer review
- Epistemology
Some Reflections

- The relationship between research, writing and clinical practice
- Listening to students
- Co-teaching – negotiation of boundaries
- Language and content – false dichotomy?

Questions we are left with:

- How does teaching generic writing skills sit alongside teaching writing within the discipline?
- Is co-teaching in the disciplines a good way forward?
- In what ways does teaching informed by Ac Lits make a difference to improving students’ writing?
- How does Ac Lits address student diversity within the constraints of teaching larger groups within a discipline?
Thank you for listening. Any questions?
References


