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*… (InvestorWords, 2009, cited in Mitchell, 2010: 134).

Our Context: two examples from our teaching

- 2nd year medical students
- SAQs

- 4th 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?
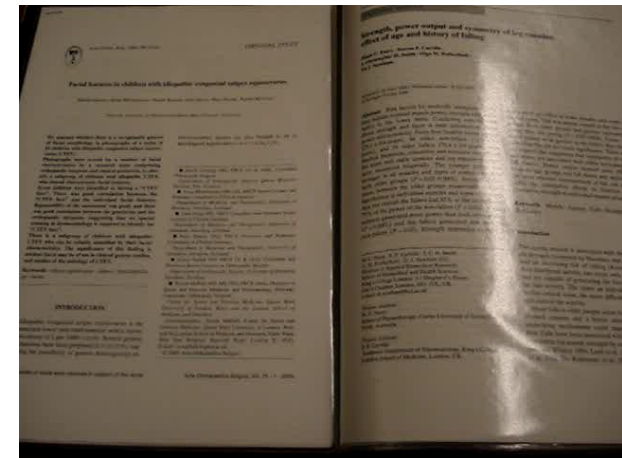
Negotiating status and identity in the discipline…

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

Lea, M. R. and Street, B. V. (1998). 'Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach'. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23 (2), 157-170.

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