

Good idea and opinion seem not important: Reflections on Students' Conceptualisations of Academic Writing

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Abstract

This article reports on a study done at a New Zealand university seeking to determine the way overseas students respond to the teaching academic writing using a text functions or structures approach, which focuses on discrete language structures and skills. Feedback was gathered from a class of 30 students through the use of a written questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The data was analysed using keyword and pattern analysis. The findings reveal a palpable disjuncture between overseas students' prior academic writing experiences and their present learning using a text functions or structures approach. The article argues that more dialogic and discursively oriented approaches to the teaching of academic writing will bring about greater value-addedness to academic writing courses even as they help alleviate students' struggles while making the switch from L1 to L2 writing.

Keywords: Academic Discourse, Academic Literacies

Introduction

This article concerns the teaching of writing for academic purposes and relates to a study conducted on students' conceptualisations of academic writing. In the course of our work teaching pre-sessional academic writing in a tertiary institution, we have come to observe that a skills-based curriculum emphasising paragraph structures, rhetorical units, discourse markers, and decontextualised vocabulary remains popular in academic writing textbooks. This tradition emerged during the 1960s (Paltridge, 2001) and according to Hyland (2002) continues to be common even though in the last twenty years there has seen an increase in the number of empirically based studies of academic writing or theoretically rigorous critical analyses which advocate approaches framed by a deeper understanding of genre (Swales, 1990, Johns, 1997, Molle and Prior, 2008); writing as a social practice rather than a set of transferable skills (Lea and Street, 1998, Lillis 2001; Barton, 2006); subject specificity (e.g. Hyland 2004) and disciplinarity (Prior, 1998).

Described by Paltridge (2001) as a *Rhetorical functions* approach, the skills-based tradition is characterised by an emphasis on "combining and arranging sentences into paragraphs based on prescribed formulae" (p. 7), as well as paragraph or short essay length writing tasks which practise a limited range of syntactic or rhetorical patterns. In Hyland's (2003) categorisation of

curriculum options for the teaching of writing, this tradition can be located within his *Focus on Text Functions* category, which he states aims to “help students develop effective paragraphs through the creation of topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions, and to develop different types of paragraphs” (p. 6).

Cumming’s (2003) analysis of the theoretical concepts that determine the writing instructor’s preferred approach categorises this emphasis on atomistic and decontextualised units of writing as a *Text Functions or Structures* conceptualisation. Cumming’s study identifies this approach as informing the teaching practices of 23 percent of the instructors he interviewed. One instructor he cites provides a clear description of this approach:

In the English for Academic Purposes course, students start with paragraphs then go through to a full essay. We are mainly concerned with academic conventions, such as quotations, bibliographies, not plagiarizing, etc. I have developed a manual that covers topic sentences, paragraph completion, proof-reading, organizing ideas, and all the usual things. We stress the structure and content, assuming they have the basics of grammar. (p. 76)

An important underlying assumption here is that firstly the paragraph is a complete unit of meaning framed by a single topic and acts as a building block for further knowledge construction in the text. Also implied is a singular, monolithic and transferable perspective of academic writing that can be developed through a series of stages.

The concept of the paragraph as a complete and logical unit of discourse as described above has been contested in the literature (Braddock, 1974; Rodgers 1966; Stern 1976). Braddock conducted an empirical analysis of both the existence and frequency of the topic sentence. He found that topic sentences occurred in only 14 per cent of his data and not always in the conventional form or placement, leading him to state that he “did not support the claims of textbook writers about the frequency and location of topic sentences” (p.301). Stern’s (1976) investigations also led him to the following conclusion:

The paragraph is not a logical unit and we should stop telling our students it is. It does not necessarily begin with a topic sentence; it does not necessarily “handle and exhaust a distinct topic” as the textbooks say it must do. It is not a composition-in-miniature, either – it is not an independent, self contained whole but a functioning part of discourse; its boundaries are not sealed but open to the surrounding text; it links as often as it divides (p. 257).

Furthermore the belief that academic writing can be taught as a transferable set of conventions or skills is also contested by academic literacies researchers such as Hyland (2004) who argues that:

Disciplinary conventions are both subtle and complex, offering a guiding framework for writers as they struggle to present their arguments in the ways that are most likely to gain their reader’s acceptance. Writing is

produced and mediated through writer's experiences of prior discourse, rather than explicit knowledge of rules, and involves making rational choices based on an understanding of how texts work within and for specific contexts and audiences (p. 145).

Reasons for Persistence of Reductionist Approaches

With the increasing number of empirical studies into the practices of written academic discourse, it would be interesting to consider why such beliefs about academic writing remain. Speed or economy is often highlighted as an important factor. Turner (2004) suggests that there is often an urgency to prepare the many EFL students like ours to enter English-medium content courses, while in actuality, developing an awareness of academic writing practices requires more time. Many institutions would like swift student enrolments into degree programmes because this improves cash-flow. As a result, EAP study becomes limited to short courses where the development of a syllabus beyond the introduction of a single model for paragraph structure and a set list of rhetorical expressions is difficult. Toh (2005) confirms this by arguing:

there are...constraints for encouraging students to think deeper into matters concerning writing...and ideology. There is, for example, the belief that an EAP programme should concentrate on modelling the structures and forms of academic English because students are paying good money to the university to learn English - they are the proverbial geese that lay the golden eggs. They will be writing for...academia and should be thoroughly enculturated into the forms and structures of academic writing both because it is a time-honoured practice and there is so little time for anything else (Toh, 2005, p. 34).

A further reason for the emphasis on the surface level tradition, also pointed out by Turner (2004) is the influence of IELTS as a regulatory requirement - a popular test that emphasises surface level skills - into instructors' conceptions of what constitutes academic writing.

Turner also suggests that the marginalisation of English for Academic purposes writing programmes in the academy means that instructors are often on short-term contracts and are not provided with research and professional development opportunities. Benesch (2001) speaks in the same vein about EAP's and ESL's perceived "service function" and "low status" (p. 40) and how this contributes to its "unequal position" vis-à-vis other disciplines, hence contributing to its "undertheorization" (p. 47). Benesch notes that 'the EAP teacher is not expected to question the pedagogical or intellectual soundness' of classroom activities and academic practices (p. 41). Instead, the "EAP teacher is mainly a conduit...rather than an activist" who would actively participate in professional dialogue about, for example, the ideological forces at work in academia or the nature of academic writing (Benesch, 2001, p. 51).

One might also add that a fair number of writing instructors would have had their initial pedagogical training in short TESOL or TEFL certificates or diplomas which focus primarily on second language teaching methodological approaches rather than substantial investigations into the nature of writing practices beyond the accessible topic-sentence structure of the paragraph.

An ethnographic case study by Curry (2006) supports this observation. The study in point follows the progress of an inexperienced part-time writing instructor, George Cleary, who uses a skills-focused curriculum with most of his assessments involving the writing of discrete paragraphs. Curry records Cleary as justifying this approach through his belief that “the paragraph is the brick that builds the building of writing. And if you can produce a good paragraph you can produce any length of document” (p.186). However, eventually 75 percent of Cleary’s students withdrew from the class leading him to conclude that:

These assignments did little to introduce students to Academic Writing. Their brevity precluded students from gaining practice in structuring and developing extended ideas or arguments, creating transitions between sections of an essay, or sustaining the task of writing over time (Curry, 2006, p. 186).

One area, however, that needs to be studied more deeply is the effect that the *Text Functions or Structures* approach has on students own conceptions of academic writing, and how by understating the linguistic complexity of written academic discourse, or by undervaluing the importance of social practices in both disciplinary and institutional contexts, writing instruction can in fact contribute to the struggle of second language writers as they try to come to terms with academic culture.

Hence this study aims at examining the tensions that emerge as learners’ struggle between their instructor’s conceptualisation of academic writing as simple, transparent, and structurally conceived, and their own prior knowledge and experience of academic texts as complex, opaque and conceptually conceived.

Research Context

The research was conducted in the context of an end-of-course evaluation exercise where overseas students enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes writing course were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the course content.

Table 1 provides a summary of the syllabus used for the writing course. The course comprises a one-semester Writing for Academic Purposes programme taught to pre-sessional students, before they are allowed to enrol for academic content courses taught at the university. Such an academic writing programme seeks help students with formal essay writing, particularly academic essay writing, which is an important requirement when it comes to the way academic courses at university are assessed. Writing instruction was generally carried out for 4 hours a week over a 14 week semester. It can be seen that the weight given to paragraph writing (almost 19 percent) and to rhetorical functions (approximately 32 percent) clearly indicates that the syllabus exemplifies the approaches discussed above.

Table 1
Summary of the prescribed writing syllabus

Thematic	Total pages ($\Gamma = 59$)	Percentage
1. Introductory discussion (warmer or ice-breaker) about academic writing	3	5.1
2. Differences between spoken and written forms of writing	2	3.4
3. Paragraph writing		18.6
topic sentence	7	11.9
ordering of sentences in a paragraph	2	3.4
concluding sentences	1	1.7
paragraph coherence	1	1.7
4. Rhetorical function paragraphs		32.2
enumeration	1	1.7
classification	1	1.7
exemplification	2	3.4
processes (natural and man-made)	3	5.1
narrative	2	3.4
comparison	4	6.8
cause and effect	4	6.8
discussion	2	3.4
5. Organising the essay	2	3.4
6. Research report		19.9
definition	1	1.7
model of small questionnaire-based research report	9	15.2
7. Tentative Language (adapted from Swales and Feak, 1994)	3	5.1
8. Academic Style (adapted from Swales and Feak, 1994)	3	5.1
9. Data Interpretation/ IELTS (adapted from Swales and Feak, 1994)	2	3.4
10. Writing paraphrases and quotations	3	5.1
11. Bibliographic Referencing	1	1.7

Research Method

Participants

The feedback was gathered from our class of 30 foreign students. The countries of origin are: China, Korea, Japan and Thailand, enrolled on our full-time one-semester writing programme. While ethical guidelines did not permit gathering of information on actual ages, the age range of the participants was between the twenties and the thirties. Ethical guidelines did not permit our gathering information on gender. In terms of language proficiency, the students

were intermediate level in English. All 30 students provided responses to the questionnaire as part of their end-of-course feedback.

Data Collection

As part of our university's overall initiative to encourage instructors to better understand students' experiences with learning English, we (Researchers A and B) sought for end-of-course feedback from students in our writing course. We administered an end-of-course questionnaire with open-ended questions about students' difficulties as well as wider involvement in the writing process and what they felt about the approaches taken to writing instruction and assessment. The questionnaire was administered by Researcher B, who was not the home instructor of the class. The end-of-course questionnaire was approved by the university ethics committee and was completed by students without either instructor being present. English was chosen for as the language for the questionnaire as it was (1) the common language among the instructors and all the participants from the different countries (2) the language used in classroom instruction throughout the semester (3) the means of communication outside the classroom.

In keeping with ethnomethodological research tradition adopting an empathic mode, which is one in which feedback from informants are treated as an important cultural and educational resource (Lawler, 2008), the administration of the questionnaire was followed up with semi-structured interviews. This was done within the same fortnight conducted by Researcher B, who took notes of students' oral responses. The average length of the interviews was 14 minutes, with the longest going for approximately 19 minutes. The semi-structured interview approach was chosen because it was felt that semi-structured interviews, as opposed to structured interviews (Handwerker, 2001) would allow opportunity for students to either voice out fresh themes and/or ideas or to emphasise certain important points they wished have us hear, while not deviating from the interview schedule. The interview schedule followed questions based on the same themes as in the questionnaire, namely, questions regarding difficulties students faced in academic writing in New Zealand, challenges students faced when they had to source for information research and students' expectations of how their work would be graded.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the answers to the questionnaires was analysed by the two researchers. The approach taken to analyse the data was pattern analysis. Pattern analysis was used to identify dominant or recurrent themes or patterns in the responses (Le Compte and Schensul, 1999). As an approach to qualitative data analysis, pattern analysis involves careful reading of the material being analysed and the identification of key phrases for further in-depth scrutiny. In various types of qualitative research, this has involved patterns emerging from key words in context, key words indicating independent, indigenous, generic or even semiotic categories (Le Compte and Schensul, 1999; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Silverman, 2001). In our case, our analysis of emergent patterns and the dominant themes thereof were cross-checked with the data from the semi-structured interviews conducted by Researcher B.

Reliability

The analyses of the data from the written questionnaire were triangulated in the following ways. They were (1) compared among the two researchers who worked independently, but with periodical consultation (2) confirmed with the students during the semi-structured interviews (3) compared against the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. In addition, attempts were made in the written questionnaire to pose questions that were centred around a similar concern, in order to facilitate cross-checking of information provided by students. For students, different questions centred around a similar concern would mean that they had greater opportunity to provide their feedback as well as to have this put across and/or emphasised in different ways. For example, Questions 4 and 5 are elaborations of Question 2 and are centred around the concern over difficulties students faced during the composition process. Responses to these questions can be used as cross-checks against each other for reliability.

Limitations of the Study

Ideally, the study could have examined specific effects of the teaching of grammar on academic writing, or even students' ideas to do with the way meanings and knowledge are constructed and enacted within specific academic writing activities, but the scope of such studies would go beyond that of an end of course feedback framework. In addition, such research would warrant deeper justifications before the university ethics committee. Hence, the data obtained cannot be used to make conclusions on the processes of meaning construction in and through writing. Ideally too, the research could have been conducted across two classes doing similar courses, but this was not the case.

Findings

Among the responses from the students were matters relating to difficulties in sourcing for information from the library, difficulties in writing reference lists as well as challenges faced when reading dense and difficult articles. However, in terms of recurrent patterns, deeper analysis revealed important patterns relating to students' conceptions of audience, students' conceptions of the complexity of academic writing, students' conceptions of contextual factors that relate to academic writing and students' expectations concerning assessment. The palpable tensions occurring between the students' conceptions of academic writing and those constructed by the course syllabus was one persistent theme that we believe warrants deeper professional reflection.

Conceptions about Audience

Our course manual only mentioned the concept of audience once in one of the introductory pages. In contrast, our students showed a strong perception of the role of audience, in their particular situation, the teacher-audience reading their work. This can be seen in the following comments where the

students bring up the problem of differences in expectations among teacher-audiences and how this presents a challenge for the student-writer.

But the problem is different: teachers have different styles in writing. So I think it's better for students to ask the teacher what kind of writing they prefer. And this also makes me confused in my writing too. (Student 9, Question 11)

It is easier to write an essay in my home country because I know more about my country than New Zealand. And I can predict what the teacher wants. (Student 12, Question 9)

The above is confirmed by what the following student has to say about 'confusion' over different 'styles' preferred by different readers:

Sometimes I feel confused about the lecturer's needs because every lecturer has a different style of writing or skills, therefore it is very hard to (know) which is the correct one. (Student 12, Question 2)

The above suggest that reader expectations and audience analysis are where we ought to begin in our writing classes. Brandt (1990) confirms this finding. Talking about the importance of teaching audience consciousness in writing Brandt (1990, p. 14) notes that literacy is "not the narrow ability to deal with texts, but the broad ability to deal with people". Also relevant is what Hyland (2003) has to say about courses that focus on language structures and text functions: such courses tend to overlook the role of audience and context - as did our curriculum.

Conceptions about Complexity

Our students reported their perception of writing in English as being simple and emphasising transition mechanics *rather than critical depth of thought or creativity*. For example:

In my country critical thinking is the most important thing, creativeness is also important to get high marks, but in New Zealand logical order, good linking words are important. (Student 3, Question 8)

As a result, they say that the conceptualisation of writing that has come across from their experience in New Zealand is that writing is 'easy' and involves merely following a set of 'rules':

To be honest, writing in NZ is much easier than in my home country because of the rules in NZ writing are simple and easier to understand. (Student 9, Question 9)

The impression that writing in English is simple extends even to simplicity in the use of vocabulary and the lack of complexity in sentence structure and idiom.

Absolutely in my language, you should write as long as possible and use a lot of complex sentences. (Student 13 Question 10)

I will use lots of difficult words and idioms when I am writing for my teacher in my home country because I can get higher marks. (Student 6, Question 10)

The above responses provide us with a number of insights. Firstly students' prior understanding of written academic discourse is that it is abstract, opaque, as well as syntactically complex. This is a view supported by linguistically focused empirical studies of academic prose (Swales 1990, Bhatia, 1993) as well as Turner (2004) who notes the high level of language complexity in academic genres. Indeed, in studies such as Dong (1998) which looks at students' perceptions of the differences between L1 and L2 writing, the observation that English writing is less complex than L1 writing is not uncommon. One of Dong's students for example said that 'an English text sounds like an elementary school student's essay (p.382), while another said that "English writing stresses more logic; Chinese is kind of descriptive so sometimes [it] is loose in logic" (p.382).

Conceptions about Engagement with Context

In their responses, students pointed out the importance of orientating the reader with adequate descriptions of context and providing other pertinent background information before turning to key arguments. This contributes to an overall feel of well roundedness in a piece of writing as opposed to a feel of sententiousness or abruptness.

In an insightful extract, a student relates how writing in the home country and in New Zealand is different:

My country: They require a lot of explanation such as history, the background of a topic based on previous knowledge; they require background facts to be written before opinions. (The comment is accompanied by a diagram with the following list - history of explanation, point, conclusion).

In New Zealand every sentence must have a key point and every paragraph must have a topic sentence; more personal or private ideas are required. (The comment is accompanied by a diagram with the following description - every sentence must have a point that is related to the topic) (Student 4, Question 10)

Here the series of steps noted as coming from the student's home country more closely resembles a set of traditional essayist or research writing expectations; including for example, the provision of a contextual overview based on published sources, which is subsequently worked into an argument or point of interest and then developed towards a conclusion. In the New Zealand context, the academic writing process has been reframed around a personal viewpoint, rather than as deeper engagement with and critique of source or contextual material. Writing is also thought of in a more atomistic topic-based way,

highlighting a discrete series of key points rather than an extended development of and engagement with ideas and meaning.

Here, one is reminded of Turner's (2004) call for the teaching of writing to include a dimension of rhetorical *felicity* (Turner, 2004), or in Rose's (1998, p. 30) words, the need for "craft and grace" to be "incorporated into the heart of our curriculum", as opposed to the belief that writing should be clipped, terse or bulleted.

Conceptions of Assessment Expectations

In relation to assessment, the students' responses were also very revealing. The following comments relate to what students thought of the approach to assessment they encountered in New Zealand.

In my home country, teacher don't mark assignments from every word and every sentence. (Student 6, Question 8)

I think it's totally different. In my home country teacher will concentrate on opinion and idea. In New Zealand teacher concentrate on grammar and academic style. (Student 5, Question 8)

In both the above responses, it can be seen that students find the fine combing of scripts for grammar and mechanics instead of depth of thought, opinion and idea, important enough to comment on.

To be honest, writing in NZ is much easier than in my home country because of the rules in NZ writing is simple and easier to understand. (Student 9, Question 9)

It's harder to write an essay in New Zealand. The big problem is language, such as grammar, spelling and academic style. Good idea and opinion seem not important. (Student 5, Question 9)

The responses reveal that students' conception of what constitutes good writing in the minds of their teachers is inherently related to 'surface' level features, such as grammar, vocabulary. The teacher goes through written pieces with a fine comb and checks for mistakes in every word and sentence. Opinion and idea do not seem that important.

Discussion

Surface Features and Technicisation of Language

The above findings bear further discussion vis-à-vis current literature on academic literacies. In the first instance, one might note that the pattern of concerns over teacher-audience preferences and assessment are a natural pre-occupation among students, particularly those for whom a positive opinion on the part of the teacher as well as a good grade would mean entry to a good course at university. Yet, these concerns and the concerns over the way academic writing came across as being simple and technicised would suggest

deeper struggles over differences between their prior notions of the complexities of academic writing, meaning construction and discursive action and what came across through the Text Functions or Structures syllabus that was used to teach them. The literature would confirm that the students' anxieties are at least warranted. Turner talks about a "technicisation of language" (p.97) which Rose (1998) describes as "atomistic, focusing on isolated bits of discourse, error centred, and linguistically reductive" (p. 11) and based on what he says is a rather outdated "mechanistic paradigm that studied language by reducing it to discrete behaviors" (p 12). Land and Whitley (1998) suggest a shift away from concentration on surface features in writing courses. Calling this "surface-level tunnel vision" and "rhetoric-level myopia" where attention is "riveted on surface concerns", they argue for this shift because of "rigid, oversimplified notions of how essays should be structured" (p. 143). Toh (2005) notes with irony that the teaching of "phrasal verbs, prepositions, collocations and active and passive voices" are "old favourites" among the surface level features taught in writing courses (p. 34).

Furthermore, Penaflorida (1998) offers a description of the misconceptions concerning grading. She notes that if 'success' in learning writing is thought of as mastering surface features, good teaching would be seen as direct skills transfer, as well as the ability to explain the meaning of phrasal verbs such as 'make up to' or 'wake up to' or the fact that 'wake' collocates with 'up' and not 'on'. 'Diligent' grading would be concurrently seen as "red penciling all over the papers" revealing that "form rather than substance is given...attention" (Penaflorida, 1998, p 73).

Implications

To help alleviate the sorts of struggles faced by the students, it appears that a shift in pedagogy would be desirable, in particular, to a pedagogy that moves away from surface concerns and superficial conceptualisations of academic writing and meaning construction. Such a pedagogy would, firstly, understand that a piece of writing is by nature a heteroglossia of different voices and that a student writer is, to use Scott and Turner's (2004) words, "beset" with different voices "the voices of past instruction, the voices of current tutors, the loud or faint voices of the student's assumptions and expectations regarding writing in English" (p 152). This gives rise to the "in-between space" which many students find themselves in - the need to have to negotiate the style and voice of, for example, a source text and that of the distant disembodied voice characterising "essay text literacy" expected in some quarters of academia (Scott and Turner, 2004, p 146). The point here is that concentration on surface features in a writing course would create yet another source of struggle, an in-between space that adds to the mixture of voices that besets student writers, instead of helping them to understand and negotiate the social, historical and contextual forces that shape such spaces. The fact is that students are aware of the importance of grader-audience. As one student commented "It is up to which teacher marked my assignment. Usually female teachers are more strict than males in New Zealand. In my home country, teachers don't mark every word and every sentence of the assignment".

Indeed, a concentration on surface features would deepen the anomaly of being found in an in-between space, the voice of the New Zealand teacher

being linked to a concern for language problems like grammar or spelling. In addition comments like the following - that “Good idea and opinion seem not important” and “In my home country, teachers don’t mark assignments from every word and every sentence” both suggest students’ being caught in an in-between space - the space between the importance of idea and opinion versus grammar, spelling and academic style.

Secondly, a pedagogy that moves away from surface considerations would need to include the element of dialogue with students concerning audience and readership, audience expectations, context and various ideological forces that come to bear on context and writing, as well as the whole issue of the complexity of written text. Lillis (2003) talks about the importance of providing opportunities for dialogue with students about the sorts of meanings they wish to have come across in their writing, instead of providing categorically rigid feedback about what is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.

Thirdly, consideration of what Rose (1998) calls a “rich model of written language development and production” (p. 28) as a counter to an atomistic model of language, would be important. The model of language adopted must also “honor the cognitive and emotional and situational dimensions of language” (Rose, 1998, p. 28) in keeping with its place in academia in the creation of knowledge and meaning. Consequently, students’ cultures, experiences, circumstances and unique histories will be taken into account and valued, particularly in how these come to bear on writing practices and conceptions of writing. Wilson notes how students and their writing have a tendency to be conceptualised ahistorically. By not attending to their cultures, circumstances and histories, writing and other educational experiences, students could be treated as abstractions rather than people, or in Wilson’s words to fellow educators, “we refuse to see them historically...we continue to conceptualise the students as our Other, as essentially different from us” (1992, p. 679). These can be through, for example, giving students pat formulas and heuristics:

By conceptualising...student ahistorically and by providing them with heuristics that purport to have universal applicability and that ignore the students’ social and cultural circumstances, we continue to shortchange them. (Wilson, 1992, p. 678)

He further notes that such heuristics, formulas and even textbooks are often fairly stilted and mechanical, producing “a kind of simulacrum...providing students with formulas, which purport to make them experts”, but actually creating an “illusion of authority that insures most of them will remain neophytes” (p. 679). It is in this connection that a richer model of writing embracing notions like the socio-historicity of text and contextual variations in writing practices might prove somewhat more useful.

Conclusion

We have attempted to reflect on how academic writing courses that focus on the *Text Functions or Structures* approach, with a particular topic sentence perception of paragraph structure could construct academic writing practice as simplified, technicised, and atomised. Creating a disjuncture between

students' prior academic writing experiences and their present learning, this could contribute to the struggle students encounter in the new institution. In order to bring about greater value-addedness to writing courses, changes of assumptions in pedagogy may be necessary. Such changes can be by way of approaches where teachers engage students in dialogue about the nature of writing as well as social forces that shape writing practice. Such reorientations could also be founded on more enriched paradigms of the nature of writing and writing instruction.

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Appendix *Questionnaire*

1. What do you think is good quality academic writing in English?
2. What problems/difficulties have you experienced with academic writing in English since coming to university?
3. Before writing an essay or project in English what do you normally do to source for information?
4. Since coming to New Zealand and/or AUT, have you found it easier or harder to get information for your essays?
5. What are some of the difficulties you face when finding information (for example from a library)?
6. When you start writing your assignment, what are some of the difficulties you encounter?
7. Since coming to New Zealand, have you been able to find solutions to your difficulties with academic writing? Or has academic writing become more difficult? Please try to explain why?
8. Do you expect your assignments to be marked more strictly in your home country or in New Zealand? Please try to explain why?
9. In your opinion, is it harder to write an essay in your home country or in New Zealand? Please try to explain why?
10. Will you write differently if you are writing for your teacher in your home country? Please try to explain why?
11. Has your study at this university helped you to solve your academic writing difficulties? If so, please describe how.

About the Authors

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