

## INTRODUCTION TO SECTION 4

Many chapters in this book make reference to the ways in which literacy practices are shaped by institutional factors but in this section questions of transformative possibility within normative institutional frames are foregrounded. The chapters take a look at how particular institutional contexts shape and influence what can and cannot be said about—or count as—academic writing, what its purposes are seen to be, and how it is experienced by those who produce it. Whilst they point to practical and conceptual difficulties in challenging institutional norms and expectations around academic writing, the chapters also record instances of where successful outcomes—transformations—have been, or might become, possible.

Corinne Boz describes a project at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, which succeeded in shifting work to help bridge students' transition from school to university away from a focus on the skills of students and onto the pedagogical practices of tutors. In doing so the project sought to transform first the dominant institutional framing of writing as a problem of student underpreparedness, and second, the apprenticeship model of teaching in which questions of discourse are left under-articulated and assumed to be acquired largely through socialization alone. Boz observes that the project contributed to a new visibility in the institution for issues around teaching and student transition. Tutors who took part found themselves better equipped to discuss their expectations of disciplinary writing and at the same time experienced the benefits of engaging in dialogue around teaching—something hitherto not prevalent or valued in a system based on teaching through individual tutorials.

Another university initiative designed to make writing visible is described by Lawrence Cleary and Íde O'Sullivan, who were charged with setting up a Writing Centre at the University of Limerick, Ireland. To achieve this institutional transformation they drew on influences from Academic Literacies and New Rhetoric, creating the Centre as an institutional resource that would help students to recognize the situated nature of disciplinary language and to exercise their own critical agency as producers of various kinds of text. At the same time an emphasis on the “composing process” would offer the individual possibilities for “perpetual transformation” of meanings, values and the self. To show how these Writing Centre goals play out in practice, Cleary and O'Sullivan take us through a strand of teaching in first year Engineering that moves from close comparative and historical analyses of textual features to a discussion of language and rhetoric's role in creating authority and identity for the writer.

Cleary and O'Sullivan describe the setting up of their Centre as a “political act,” that is, a principled intervention in the status quo based on certain choices. Other

chapters describe similarly political moves. The Research Training Event series developed by the British Association for Lectures in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP- currently also referred to as Global Forum for English for Academic Purposes Professionals), and described by Lia Blaj-Ward in her chapter, draws on Academic Literacies thinking to further the BALEAP goal of equipping and supporting EAP lecturers to become active researchers of their practice. The series is motivated by a recognition of the way in which the institutional positionings of EAP teachers' influence and limit the opportunities they have to conduct research, and it seeks to redress this. The rationale for the work contains a recognition that developing the status and self-awareness of EAP practitioners is a professional imperative if they are not simply to serve, but also to shape, global, governmental and institutional agendas around the international student experience.

The agency and institutional positioning of the writing teacher is the subject of Joan Turner's chapter also. While noting her institution's official claim to offer students a "transformative experience," her focus is on the "thornier" challenge of transforming institutional conceptions and expectations—here specifically in relation to proofreading. She reproduces a dialogue with a colleague that begins to nudge these understandings and expectations towards greater reflexivity and critique. Although she makes no claim to have fully achieved "transformation" through this encounter, Turner nevertheless contends that engaging in such dialogues within the institution should represent an important dimension of the work of the academic literacies practitioner.

How writing is framed institutionally is frequently a reflection of and response to wider agenda, national and international. In their chapter, Angels Oliva-Girbau and Marta Milian Gubern, explore the complex framings of what it means to write academically in a Catalan University that needs to comply with the Bologna process. They explain how they created an introductory course that aimed to equip students to write in genres of academic English and at the same time to exercise critical caution about such genres and the diminution and downgrading of expressions of knowing within their own Catalan language and culture. They reflect on the difficulty of maintaining these two aims at once, particularly the difficulty of engaging students in "contestation." They report that students were most likely to comply with a sense of English as the "language of prestige," and to embrace "Anglo-American academic genres as the solution to their communication issues," making their transformations as learners *towards* rather than away from the normative. The chapter sharply highlights what's at stake in such a process of assimilation from the perspective of a minority language.

The power of contextual framings and dominant ideologies is also looked at in Catalina Neculai's discussion of the possibilities for writing that are opened up and closed down by the neo-liberal agenda in UK Higher Education. She describes how the "calculative, market-driven spirit" of her modern university has created an em-

ployability curriculum which is instrumental in its motivations. At the same time, however, she argues that this curriculum provides spaces and visibility for more humanistically-inclined teaching of writing. So whilst the discourse of employability frames writing at an institutional—and arguably, sectoral—level, it is possible, she argues, for smaller groupings or individuals to exercise less compliant forms of agency. Further, Neculai argues that teaching academic writing as a discipline—“a functional field with its own meta-codes, discourses and community of practice”—is a way of transforming its status from “service” to “subject.”

In contrast, perhaps, the “cautionary tale” which Kelly Peake and Sally Mitchell have to tell restates the difficulties of working meaningfully with writing where institutional framings identify it as a deficiency of skill that can be overcome. They describe their attempt to bridge sectoral boundaries by working with secondary schools on students’ writing, detailing how, in order to access funding streams and institutional agendas, they had to work directly with students and with autonomous understandings of and approaches to writing—and language more generally—as well as with the dominant logic surrounding progression from school to university. They argue that the limited success of their enterprise came from working with, rather than challenging these understandings. A more genuinely transformative approach, they conclude, needs to involve work with teachers, exploring and developing their practices in order to understand and enhance the experiences of their students. Peake and Mitchell note the irony of reaching this conclusion, which—but for the persistence and power of dominant framings of literacy and deficit—they had known all along.

Transformation then is always an ongoing ideological tussle in which assumptions—one’s own, one’s students, one’s collaborators, the institution’s—need to be subject to scrutiny and discussion.

This section includes two *Reflections* pieces. The first is a conversation between Brian Street, Mary R. Lea and Theresa Lillis looking back at research which opened up the differing perspectives of students and of teaching staff in various disciplines, and considering the options it presented for taking a transformative stance towards what is possible in universities. Foregrounding the importance of ethnography as a way of making visible often taken-for-granted practices (see Sally Mitchell’s comments on the importance of ethnography in the Introduction to the book; see also Reflections 2) they reflect that big institutional issues, such as access and success, are simply not fixed by deficit-driven skills-based approaches. They maintain that it is the impulse in Academic Literacies to question and contest that provides a basis for constructive ways forward in transforming institutions.

The book closes with Lucia Thesen who reminds us of how institutions are historically and geographically located and the consequences of such locations for the ways in which we seek to understand practice, pedagogy and theory. Thesen explores what a transformative agenda looks like from the perspective of the global

south. Her Reflections touch on many of the themes raised in the book whilst engaging from the specific geohistorical location of South Africa. She foregrounds: the experiences and desires of students from communities historically excluded from higher education, the question of what it means to belong in academia, the potential threats to other senses of social belonging resulting from taking part in academia, the impact on meaning making of dominant academic literacy conventions and ideologies of knowledge. In a book where many of the contributions are from the global north, Thesen's Reflections remind us all of the need to engage in transnational conversations and, when doing so, to acknowledge the historical specificity of our speaking positions, seeking to develop shared understandings without masking difference.