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EAP Writing: Reflections on Divergent Perceptions and Expectations among Tutors and Students

Darryl HOCKING
AUT University, New Zealand

Glenn TOH
Tama University School of Global Studies, Japan

An atomistic and skills-based pedagogical tradition with a general focus on topic sentences, prescribed paragraph structures and rhetorical units has been seen in various quarters to dominate the instruction of English academic writing to L2 speakers in many English medium tertiary environments. While it would appear that students are for the most part acculturated to these codings and classifications, our student feedback provides evidence that initially the learners' own conceptualisation of written academic discourse actually lies closer to the linguistically complex and socially constituted understanding that is now firmly established in the literature. We suggest that such divergent perceptions may construct unnecessary in-between spaces of conflicting voices and thus contribute to the struggle of second language writers as they come to terms with the academic writing practices of their target disciplines. In addition, referring to social anthropological research, we explore how the perpetuation of an atomistic and skills-based pedagogy in the teaching of writing in the L2 tertiary environment may in fact be inherently linked to visions of professionalism.

Introduction

This article arises out of our collective experience of teaching writing for academic purposes in a New Zealand university and is based, in particular, on feedback collected from students enrolled on our EAP writing programme which largely adhered to a formalist, skills-based pedagogy. The feedback revealed that students often brought more

linguistically complex and socially constituted perceptions of academic writing to their writing course. However, the type of instruction received in the course led many students to reconceptualise the academic writing practices of their new environment as atomistic, monolithic and transferable. As a result, we suggest that a disjuncture between students' prior and present experiences of academic writing is created, which in turn contributes to the struggle faced by second language writers as they attempt to reconcile the voices of the writing classes with the subsequent demands of their academic courses. In reflecting on this concern, we question why institutions and writing instructors continue to champion a formalist and skills-based conceptualisation of writing, choosing to bypass the many socio-constructionist, socio-constructivist and socio-historically situated discussions of written language that have appeared in the last decade. As a response, we look to Goodwin's (1994) notion of *professional vision* and suggest that the cognitive and perceptual parameters that define the field of expertise and profession of the academic writing instructor have been discursively enacted through the formalist traditions of the topic-sentence paragraph, rhetorical units and discourse markers, and that once such codings and classifications have been accepted as a common sense frame of reference by the profession, it becomes difficult for these to be withdrawn or abandoned. The aim of the article is ultimately to argue for richer conversations around the teaching of academic writing, as we examine our own practices to provide our largely Chinese, Korean and Japanese student cohort with an enriched experience in the writing class. We begin with a brief overview of formalist writing pedagogy.

Writing Pedagogy

A formalist writing pedagogy that emphasises discrete and transferable skills including the teaching of heuristics, paragraph structures and discourse markers became prevalent during the 1960s (Paltridge, 2001) and continues to increase in popularity as noted in Hyland (2002). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) categorise it as a *focus on form or current traditional rhetoric* and Paltridge (2001) as a *rhetorical functions* approach. It is described as skills-based and characterised by an emphasis on "combining and arranging sentences into paragraphs based on prescribed formulae" (Paltridge, 2001, p. 7), as well as paragraph or short essay length writing tasks which practice a range of syntactic or rhetorical

patterns. Similarly in Hyland's (2003) categorisation of curriculum options for the teaching of writing this approach can be located within his *focus on text functions* category, which he notes 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). In Cumming's (2003) analysis of theoretical concepts that come to bear on a writing instructor's preferred approach, this emphasis on atomistic and decontextualised units of writing is spoken of as a *text functions or structures* conceptualisation. This moniker will be used throughout our paper.

In Cumming's (2003) study, he identifies the *text functions or structures* approach as informing the teaching practices of 23% 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 underlying assumption here is that firstly the paragraph is a complete unit of meaning framed by a single theme 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. Warschauer (2002) captures this in his description of an EAP instructor called Mary Sanders:

> Mary believed that … students needed to master the formal structures of what she considered the standard academic essay … Her firm commitment to the traditional … essay was evidenced … by the handouts she gave to her class, which in one typical case included these instructions …
>
> Your organization is important:
> - An introduction of three sentences with a thesis statement at the end,
> - Development paragraphs (2–3) with keyword and "most important" transitions in each paragraph
> - Comparison transition in the body of each paragraph
> - A conclusion of at least three sentences (p. 76)

Many of the assumptions that underlie text functions or structures approach, as exemplified above, have been contradicted in the literature. For example, Braddock's (1974) empirical analysis of both the existence and frequency of the topic sentence concluded that they occurred in only 14% of his data and not always in the conventional form or placement. This led 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 conclude that 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).

The belief that academic writing can be taught as a transferable set of conventions or skills has also been challenged by researchers writing in the area of academic literacies. Hyland (2004) conducted corpus-based studies that identify the need for a pedagogical tradition that follows a discipline-specific conceptualisation of academic literacy. For Hyland, "[p]araphrasing, citing, reviewing the literature, and other standard features of EAP courses are not uniform practices reducible to generic advice" (p. 145). Instead, students need to develop an awareness of the particular textual practices of a discipline and how these are inherently related to and mediated by the social practices of that discipline, including the construction of disciplinary knowledge. Hyland's research also disputes the efficacy of an atomised, step-by-step approach to teaching academic writing by the Cumming's instructor:

> The ... argument, that weak students need to control core forms before getting on to specific, and presumably more difficult, features of language is, quite simply, not supported by research in second language acquisition. Students do not learn in this step-by step fashion according to some externally imposed sequence. They acquire features of the language as they need them, rather than incrementally in the order that teachers present them. Students may need to attend more to sentence-level features at lower proficiencies, and perhaps require remedial attention in some areas, but there is no need to ignore either discourse or discipline. (Hyland, 2002, p. 388)

Along with Hyland's corpus-based studies that investigate the discipline-specific and socially-constructed nature of academic writing, there is an

increasing number of other empirically based studies into academic writing that move away from the atomistic, skills-based conceptualisation of writing underlying the text functions or structures approach. These studies advocate approaches framed by an understanding of identity (Ivanič, 1998), genre (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Swales, 1990), writing as a social practice (Johns, 1997; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001; Pardoe, 2000; Warschauer, 2002) and writing as complex literate activity (Casanave, 2002; Prior 1998).

Data Collection and Context

Our cohort, comprising students from China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand, were enrolled in our writing paper as part of a one-semester, full-time pre-sessional EAP programme, designed to prepare students for subsequent degree study. Like many other EAP programmes the four papers were traditionally demarcated by the four skills. Table 1 provides a summarised outline of the prescribed syllabus used for the writing course. Writing instruction was carried out for 4 hours a week over the 14-week semester. The weight given to paragraph writing (almost 19%) and to rhetorical functions (approximately 32%) clearly indicates that the syllabus exemplifies the text functions or structures conceptualisation discussed above.

The feedback we collected from students was part of an overall initiative supported by the university for instructors to better understand EFL students' experience with learning and using English. On our part, we sought to obtain feedback on challenges students faced with writing. To this end, we administered an end-of-course survey. Our class of 30 students were given a questionnaire with eleven prompts, filled in the absence of the instructors. The feedback prompts were approved by the university ethics committee and are appended after the article. Students were told that (1) the feedback was to be used for course planning and improvement and had nothing to do with final performance grading; and (2) they were under no compulsion to respond to any or every single prompt. While the results we obtained have been separately collated and analysed question by question vis-à-vis difficulties students faced in matters like sourcing for information, internet searches, format of assignment etc., we also discovered interesting feedback from different students over the issues of audience and addressivity, conceptions of complexity, content and writing assessment, in and amongst responses

Table 1. A summary of the writing course's prescribed syllabus

Thematic	Pages (Total: 59)	Percentage
1. Introductory discussion (warmer or icebreaker) 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		1.9
definition	1	1.7
model of small questionnaire-based research report	9	15.2
7. Tentative language (adapted from Swales & Feak, 1994)	3	5.1
8. Academic style (adapted from Swales & Feak, 1994)	3	5.1
9. Data interpretation/IELTS (adapted from Swales & Feak, 1994)	2	3.4
10. Writing paraphrases and quotations	3	5.1
11. Bibliographic referencing	1	1.7

across different questions. We discuss these issues in the following section vis-à-vis the concerns with text functions or structures conceptualisations highlighted earlier.

Results: What Students Had to Say

Student Conceptions of Audience and Addressivity

Students' responses indicated their awareness of the role of audience. *(Note that the students responses are presented in their original form; the writing has not been edited.)* They clearly understood that their writing was being directed at a particular reader and that to misjudge the expectations of this reader could result in a less than positive evaluation of their written work:

> But the problem is different teachers have different style in writing. So I think it's better for student to ask the teacher what kind of writing do they prefer to. And this also makes me confused to write (Student 9, Question 11).

> Sometimes I feel confuse that the lecturer's needs because every lecturer has different style of writing or skills, therefore it is very hard to do which is the right one/correct (Student 12, Question 2).

> It is too hard to understand right way of writing, because teachers have different style. (Student 1, Question 2).

> It is more 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 needs (Student 12, Question 9).

Here students implied that knowledge of audience was a central component of their prior writing processes and practices, yet this was an area that now led to confusion due to lack of information about (or attention to) audience in their new academic context. In contrast, students implied that they were aware of audience expectations when asked if they would write differently for teachers in their home countries:

> Yes, we know what our teachers want, so we would try to match what teachers want, try to get good marks (Student 14, Question 10).

In fact our material for the writing course only briefly mentioned the concept of *audience* once. Furthermore, the notion of audience in the student responses above referred to the students' own writing instructors,

revealing that even within a single writing course, students are attuned to the varying expectations of different individual instructors.

The students' conceptualisation of the centrality of audience finds support in the literature. Lillis (2001) acknowledges that the practices of meaning-making in student writing are always dependant on the reader, often the tutor. For students, establishing tutor expectations through assignment guidelines and tutor discussions is a primary concern and not something of an afterthought (Lillis, 2001). Supporting this view, Casanave (2004) argues that "reader expectations and audience analysis are where we need to begin in many L2 writing classes" (p. 50) and Brandt (1990), referring to the importance of teaching audience consciousness in writing, notes that literacy is "not the narrow ability to deal with texts, but the broad ability to deal with people" (p. 14).

Student Conceptions of Complexity in L2 Academic Writing

The students generally perceived the expectations of academic writing in their home country as more complex and critically demanding than those in the New Zealand environment:

> To be honest, 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).
>
> In my country critical thinking is the most important thing, creativeness is also important to get high mark, but in New Zealand that logical order, good linking words is important in my opinion (Student 3, Question 8).
>
> Absolutely in my language, you should write as long as possible and use a lot of complex sentences (Student 13, Question 10).
>
> Yes 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).

A number of interesting insights can be observed from these extracts. Firstly, students' prior understanding of written academic discourse in their L1 is that it is abstract, opaque, as well as grammatically and syntactically complex, while academic writing in their (New Zealand) L2 environment is simple and overly-focused on structure and order. These comments mirror those found in studies such as Dong's (1998), which examine students' perceptions of the differences between L1 and L2 writing. One of Dong's postgraduate student participants, for

example, suggested that "an English text sounds like an elementary school student's essay" (p. 382), while another suggested that "English writing stresses more logic; Chinese is kind of descriptive so sometimes [it] is loose in logic" (p. 382). However, contrasting such views are many empirical studies that highlight the profound lexico-syntactic or discoursal complexities of English academic written discourse and writing practices from a discipline-specific, or social perspective. Swales (1990), for example, has identified the rhetorical complexity required in the research article. Bhatia (1993) points out the complex use of nominalisation in scientific writing as "unnecessarily dense and self contained" (p. 29). Huckin and Olsen (1991) identify the complexity of the English article system that is frequently described as confusing for students. Turner (2004) and Scott and Turner (2004) also identify the high level of language complexity and felicity required for the increasingly popular cultural and critical–theoretical subjects. Prior (1998) and Casanave (2002) explore the complex social processes of enculturation as students struggle to participate successfully in the academic community through their writing practices. They perceive writing as shaped by dynamic, fluid and heterogeneous interactions between "persons, practices, artifacts, institutions, and communities" (Prior, 1998, p. 31), rather than by an established set of generalizable linguistic or rhetorical features that can be easily taught in a step by step manner. Hinkel's (2002) important comparative exploration of L1 and L2 student writing concludes that even after years of instruction most students are unprepared for the complex demands of academic writing and states that "the various advanced syntactic constructions that are commonly associated with academic texts seem to be largely missing from NNS essays" (p. 258). As a result students produce "written discourse not too distant from that found in the texts of elementary school students" (p. 257), perhaps providing an explanation for the earlier remark by Dong's postgraduate student.

We have therefore come to believe that perhaps complicit in the student conceptualisation of academic writing as simple and overly-focused on structure and order is the text functions or structures approach. This approach emphasises topic-sentence paragraphs, classical rhetorical modes and linking words, guiding students to produce uncomplicated and logically transparent model paragraphs (Warschauer, 2002). Students perceive these paragraphs as authentic examples of English academic writing; based on prior experiences of academic writing in

their home countries, they conceptualise English academic discourse as cognitively, creatively and structurally less-demanding. Jacoby, Leech and Holten (1995) writing about the value of such approaches in preparing ESL students for undergraduate science programmes have stated that:

> These approaches do not familiarize beginning science students, who are simultaneously developing writers and second language learners, with the complex linguistic demands of the experimental report or the sophisticated combination of description and persuasion necessary in scientific argument. (p. 351)

It should be pointed out that any discussion of genre or subject-specificity, which Jacoby et al. (1995) and many others (e.g., Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2002, 2004; Swales, 1990) have identified as central for the development of student writing, was largely absent from our writing course. One exception was the mention of the data-based research project genre, which our student manual introduced prescriptively without reference to disciplinary variation, and the single model provided had little resemblance to any authentic research project text. An awareness of genre was rarely evidenced in the student responses, except for three students who remarked that the course had taught them the format of a "project." Interestingly, one student did imply an understanding of the importance of disciplinarity:

> In my opinion, more exercises which relate to the university's courses are very important and good for preparation (Student 12, Question 1).

Student Conceptions of Content

Another insightful extract involves an explicit description of a student's perception of the differences in content between writing in their home country and in a New Zealand context:

> My country: They require much explanation such as history of that, background of that topic which based on my previous knowledge; require facts of the knowledge before to write my opinions. [The student has added a diagram to this response which depicts the page of an essay annotated with the following list.] History of explanation, point, conclusion (Student 4, Question 10).

The same student also suggested that:

> New Zealand perhaps only require to write every key point of writing for every sentence; more require private ideas. [The student has also added a diagram to this response which depicts the page of an essay annotated with the following.] Every sentence have the point all related to the topic (Student 4, Question 10).

Here the series of steps identified as belonging to the student's home country more closely matches what we believe frequently appears, albeit with varying differences according to genre and discipline, in English academic essayist literature. In the New Zealand English context the student has reframed the academic writing process around the personal viewpoint, rather than as an engagement with published secondary source material. It has also been conceived in a rather more atomistic topic-based way which highlights a discrete series of key points rather than the extended development of ideas. The perceived lack of emphasis on opinion in (New Zealand) English academic discourse is reinforced in the following extract.

> 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).

Student Conceptions of Assessment

Relating to marking and grading, the students often responded with a detailed indication of the different expectations of tutors from the different contexts.

> In my home country, teacher doesn'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).

We may also note from the above that the responses make mention of attention being paid to words, sentences, grammar and grammar rules—suggesting that the students are picking up on the prevalence of a text functions or structures approach even in assessment as opposed to the importance of "opinion and idea" (Student 5).

Discussion

Academic Writing Instruction and In-between Spaces

The feedback above could suggest that L2 students have instinctive conceptualisations of writing practice as concerning audience, disciplinarity as well as rhetorical and lexico-syntactical complexity. However, the approaches underlying rule-focused and skills-based writing instruction, such as that seen in the text functions or structures approach, invoke different, and perhaps problematic, conceptualisations of writing practice in the minds of these students.

In this sense one consequence of this approach could involve a complication to the natural development that occurs as students move from one writing community based around a range of unique voices or discourses into another. Scott and Turner (2004) refer to this space as an "in-between space," a site between the "institutional past and institutional present with their different requirements" (p. 152). They suggest that all student writers will at some stage naturally occupy a space between the texts that they are familiar with and complex writing expectations of the academic disciplines that they will become members of. While they discuss this space as consisting of "competing voices" (p. 147) that often produce what are perceived of as language problems, Scott and Turner also suggest that the in-between space constitutes both challenge and potential for development as students creatively bring these diverse voices together. Similarly, our student feedback indicates that a significant and pedagogically useful relationship exists between the students' prior and present experiences of academic writing which has pedagogical potential in the academic writing class. For example, students could be given exercises where they compare their former experiences of written academic discourse and practices, such as writing for a specific tutor, with their contemporary environment. This might raise important issues regarding strategies for writing to a specific audience which are largely missing from a skills-centred and rule-focused text functions or structures conceptualisation of academic writing. Instead, through a collection of published writing exercises and supplementary materials, mostly inauthentic model texts, the *text functions or structures* approach has constructed an additional voice for the academy. By acculturating their students to this voice, writing instructors are creating yet another in-between space through which students must move in order to

establish themselves within the written genres and discourses of their chosen disciplines.

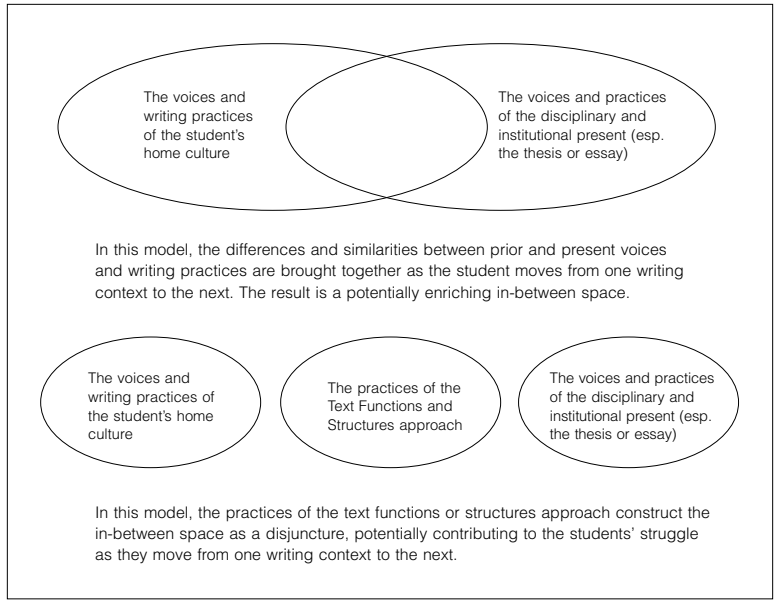
Reconceptualising the work of Scott and Turner (2004), these two different in-between spaces are depicted in Figure 1. In the first diagram the L2 student writer either instinctively, or through the writing class, draws upon past experiences in their attempt to develop an awareness of the writing in their new academic contexts. As previously mentioned, this in-between space has the potential for enriching the academic writing experience of students. In contrast, the lower diagram illustrates the in-between space as a disjuncture that often occurs when the decontextualised and inauthentic voice of the text functions or structures approach is uncritically introduced to students. This in-between space of unreconciled divergent voices is potentially complicit in the struggle that occurs when students eventually enter the writing context of their individual academic courses.

Why a Text Functions or Structures Conceptualisation?

As a result of the feedback we also thought it necessary to consider why many published textbooks and writing courses, such as our own, continued to develop materials based on such formalist conceptualisations of academic writing, when it was apparent that an increasing number of empirical studies are openly critical of such approaches. Interestingly, the literature presented us with a number of explanations, many of which will be outlined below. However, while these all appear plausible from an economic perspective, they fail to take into consideration the agentive capacity of writing instructors; usually dedicated and discerning individuals, who are unlikely to yield to the financial motives of their institutions. In this section we will first review existing explanations for the pervasiveness of the text functions or structures conceptualisation in the instruction of academic writing, and following this we will examine an alternative position which takes into consideration the role of professionalism and its ability to formalise disciplinary discourses—often trumping alternative perspectives, or those of individuals.

Speed or economy is often foregrounded as an important factor. Turner (2004) suggests that there is often an urgency to prepare the many non-English speakers for swift entry into English-medium content courses, without spending the necessary time and money developing the language proficiency and awareness of academic writing practices

Figure 1. In-between spaces.



central to success in the student's particular academic context. In many institutions this urgency could be reinforced by faculty colleagues who require the financial outcomes that swift student enrolment into their degree programmes facilitates. Rose (1998) says that this approach has "staying power" because it comes across as one that is "putatively objective" and hence is useful when "budgets crunch and accountability looms" (p. 14):

> A scientific-atomistic approach to language, with its attendant tallies and charts, nicely fits an economic … decision making model. When in doubt or when scared or when pressed, count. (Rose, 1998, p. 15)

As a result EAP study becomes limited to short courses or single semesters where the development of a syllabus beyond the introduction of a single model for paragraph structure and a limited list of rhetorical expressions proves difficult.

A further rationale for the emphasis on the surface level tradition, also pointed out by Turner, is the infiltration of IELTS regulatory requirements—a popular yet reductionist screening test for academic

writing proficiency—into instructors' conceptions of what constitutes academic writing practice. This is clearly observed in an exercise from the prescribed syllabus central to this article where an exercise on data interpretation adapted from Swales and Feak's (1994) excellent research-based writing course has been misleadingly recontextualised as preparation for writing an IELTS question. The descriptive and contextually rich approach of Swales and Feak's chapter, which provides numerous texts and questions to facilitate students' recognition and subsequent production of this feature of academic writing, has been condensed into a brief prescriptive classification, with only one example from a model IELTS answer. There is no indication of the linguistic or rhetorical complexity that this feature entails, or the various forms it might take and why.

Furthermore, Turner (2004) implies that the marginalisation of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing programmes in the academy means that the staff employed are often on short-term contracts and are therefore not provided with the research and professional development opportunities, or necessary interdepartmental contacts, afforded those on longer term or permanent contracts. Benesch (2001) speaks in the same vein about EAP's (and ESL's) perceived "service function" and "low status" (p. 40) in academia and how it 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 (2001, p. 41). Instead, the "EAP teacher is mainly a conduit … rather than an activist" (p. 51), one who would actively participate in theoretical dialogue about, for example, the ideological forces at work in academia or the nature of academic writing. We might perhaps add to this that a portion of academic writing instructors would have had their initial pedagogical training in TESOL or TEFL certificates or diplomas which focus primarily on second language teaching methodological practices, rather than substantial investigations into the nature of writing practices beyond the accessible topic-sentence structure of the paragraph.

An interesting ethnographic case study by Curry (2006) supports this observation. Her study follows the progress of a part-time and less experienced academic writing instructor called George Cleary (a pseudonym), who implements a skills-focused curriculum with most 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% of Cleary's students withdrew from the class leading Curry 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. (2006, p. 186)

The Professional Visions of Writing Instruction

Although the feedback provides evidence that a number of disjunctures exist between students' perception of academic writing and those of the English academic writing course, ultimately (and unlike Curry's example above), our students exhibited a broad acceptance and internalisation of the text functions or structures conceptualisation presented by their writing instructors. This acceptance can be evidenced in the (positive) course appraisal about whether the course had helped solve the students' academic writing difficulties:

> Yes because I know what's the academic writing and how to write in academic style. It's very helpful (Student 15, Question 11).
>
> Yes I learned many vocabulary, and how to write academically (Student 14, Question 11).
>
> Yes, [they] provide very good quality of academic writing as well as the lecturers. They provided very detail about the rules of writing skills and suitable ways to improve writing (Student 12, Question 11).

These comments, which highlight the usefulness of writing skills, often differed to those responses that students had given earlier identifying the importance of audience and concept. This leads us to a central question: Why are students so readily acculturated to the technicised and reductive conceptualisation of writing frequently presented by their academic writing instructors?[1]

A possible answer to this question, and an alternative answer to the related question of why writing courses continue to reproduce a technicised, monolithic and simplified conceptualisation of English academic

written discourse, could lie in social anthropology work of Charles Goodwin (1994). Goodwin's notion of *professional vision* explores the way in which a professional community will discursively establish the cognitive and perceptual parameters that define their particular field of expertise. This has the effect of distinguishing one profession from another, but more importantly influences the way others will perceive a profession's "objects of knowledge" (1994, p. 606). For example, an archaeologist and a farmer will conceptualise an identical piece of soil in distinctly different ways; the archaeologist will view marks of history, while the farmer will view its horticultural potential. According to Goodwin, this is achieved through discursive practices, including *coding*, *highlighting* and the *articulation of material representations*; practices which can be identified as underpinning the professional community of writing instructors who continue to support a skills-based text functions or structures conceptualisation of academic writing. These include the highlighting of the paragraph as the central unit of meaning or organisation in the academic essay and the cropping (or total removal) of the surrounding text so that the indistinguishable clutter of textual complexity is relocated into the background. Furthermore, and contradicting research in academic writing, sentences in essays are conceptualised into codings such as topic sentences, supporting sentences and concluding sentences. Similarly, the writing instructor recontextualises (Linell, 1998) the professional classifications of the classical rhetorician (in itself a discursive act of professionalism) by highlighting a limited set of rhetorical functions, such as cause and effect, comparison and contrast or exemplification which they perceive as constituting the practice of academic writing. These discursive practices are further amplified by being articulated as graphic representations. The latter, for example, is evidenced in the tabulated representations of comparison and contrast, or cause and effect paragraphs, reproduced repeatedly in English academic writing textbooks—artifacts which are produced by and produce the profession of academic writing instruction.

Goodwin makes two relevant additional points. Firstly professional perceptions are regularly reinforced by those with professional authority (e.g., the writing instructors), while those without membership of the professional or social group (e.g., students) lack any power to code or categorize meanings. Secondly, and importantly, once a discursive practice such as a particular profession's coding system is made explicit and accepted as a frame of reference for perceiving a particular phenomena,

then it can be difficult to remove this particular way of understanding from our consciousness, whether one agrees or not.

Therefore, once students are exposed to the discursive structures, or classification systems, that constitute the professional practices of general English academic writing, and these are accepted as a common sense frame of reference for perceiving the phenomena of English academic writing, then it is difficult for students to withdraw this particular perception from their consciousness, even though, as seen in the student feedback above, they themselves have gathered alternative understandings of academic discourse. These perceptions have been backgrounded by the institutionally, and socially authorised, "experts" of the "profession" who have at their disposal, a set of tools involving talk, gesture, text and other artifacts for foregrounding their profession's discursive practices. The writing "experts" use these practices to frame all phenomena, even if it results in the bizarre. One example of this can be seen in the advice given on a respected university website, which suggests that in art historical writing, the topic sentence should occur in the final position of each paragraph. It could be argued that any criticism of existing professional practices or suggestions of alternative codings, classifications, or material representations may be perceived as a rupture to the profession and to the identities that produce and are produced by the profession through these discursive structures. As Hyland (2002) points out the increasingly uneven allocation towards the kinds of transferable-skills based monolithic conceptualisations of academic writing in universities today means that instructors with a pedagogical interest in more critical, social-constructionist or subject-specific based frameworks can face a degree of marginalisation. Interestingly, according to Jordan (2002) a number of studies show that professionalism and the desire for an increase in "professional status" (p. 75) has been a persistent concern of the EAP community since the mid seventies.

Changes to the Programme

The above discussion as well as the student responses presents a brief reflection of what changes can be made to a programme such as ours vis-à-vis the literature. In considering possibilities for change, it must first be acknowledged that changes, in this case to a course predicated on a text functions or structures conceptualisation of writing, cannot happen overnight, given its deep-seatedness by way of professional

vision and understanding. Changes of such nature need to be proposed with both sensitivity to and consideration for a different pace at which they can be comfortably accommodated and/ or assimilated by different people.

Nevertheless, where possible in our own classes, we are beginning the process of incorporating in-class activities which engender a greater sense among students that writing involves thinking about deeper complexities like in the question of who acts in relation to whom. Kress' social theory of writing places writing in the domain of social interaction and questions like "who are the participants involved in the social action as it takes place?" and "what are their social relations with each other" (Kress, 2003, p. 84). This notion is useful not just in terms of acknowledging the importance of reader-audience consciousness. Foregrounding the nexus of intricacies that characterises social interaction will draw and build on students' conceptualisation of writing as being something complex both in terms of language and content. Activities by way of having students consider—(1) problems of a social, interactive, moral or ethical nature which evade pat answers; (2) the complex confluence of participant relationships, for example, between writers and readers of different histories, backgrounds and experiences; and (3) even experiences and histories that students bring with them that become part of meaning making, will help counter the primacy of the idea that a piece of writing is a rigid assembly of paragraphs each held together by a topic sentence which delineate a clear-cut if sterile opinion. These will very hopefully help counter the possibility of the in-between space students would otherwise find themselves in, given the nature of a text functions or structures conceptualisation.

Our hope is that these albeit modest changes will afford a picture of writing as something situated in and mediating real world real life encounters, rather different from an understanding of writing as conventions and skills, "framed as definition and declarative knowledge" (Blanton, 1998, p. 224). Hopefully too, students will find the notion that written texts connect people to one another as they conduct their lives and business (Blanton, 1998) and are inherently linked to social institutions, events, practices and relationships, to be more in tandem with their understandings of what writing is about.

Conclusion

We have seen how the text functions or structures approach, used as a guiding pedagogical framework, can lead to student reconceptualisation of English academic writing as technicised, atomised, monolithic and skills-based. We suggest that this process of reconceptualisation involves the transference of professionally constituted perceptual fields and following Goodwin (1994) is enacted through discursive practices including coding, highlighting and the articulation of material representations. As a consequence, we feel that writing instruction could be complicit in the struggle that second language students encounter as they attempt to come to terms with the academic writing expectations of their new institutional or disciplinary context. This is because a text functions or structures approach creates a disjuncture between students' (potentially beneficial) prior and present experiences of academic writing and instead establishes an in-between space which results in further struggle as students attempt to reconcile the ambivalent voices of the academic writing course with their new writing demands. Hence, we suggest that writing in fact speaks more of social and individual histories, intertextual relationships, dialogic engagements and interconnectedness, affording imaginative possibilities and challenging conversations both in understanding literacies in general and pedagogies in particular.

Note

1. One potential reason could be that students are not inclined to be openly critical of a course they have paid good money for, especially when they have developed an affinity with the university.

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Darryl HOCKING is a senior lecturer in the School of Languages and Social Sciences at AUT University, New Zealand. His research interests involve academic literacies and the analysis of genres specific to

disciplinary writing in art and design. He has previously worked in the English Language Unit at Goldsmiths, University of London and is a co-author of Innovations, a course in general English.

Glenn TOH has taught English and done language teacher training in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Japan and in various parts of Southeast Asia. He keeps a close watch on developments in language, ideology and power and in critical and academic literacies as part of his work.

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.