



The Challenges of Academic Literacy/ies in Teaching Writing: Adaption, Contexts and Conditions

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Editorial

The Challenges of Academic Literacy/ies in Teaching Writing: Adaption, Contexts and Conditions

Welcome to the winter issue of the *Journal of Academic Writing* (JoAW) 2023. As the journal is dedicated to the EATAW community and sphere, it is hardly surprising that a focus on academic literacy surfaces in a number of ways in the articles, teaching practice pieces, and book review featured in this issue. Various accounts exist of how the conceptual model of 'Academic Literacies' established by Lea and Street (1998) translates or relates to other ways of thinking about topics to do with academic writing (Russell et al., 2009; Lillis et al., 2015; Hilsdon et al., 2019). Many *JoAW* readers have an understanding of Lea and Street's (1998) model of Academic Literacies as well as of other theories of academic literacy practices. Being presented with specific instances, teacher applications, and student conceptions will add to our shared fuller understanding and direct or indirect adaptation of academic literacy in our praxis.

As colleagues in Academic Writing Development, we might 'know' that any models, frameworks, or theories we pick up require adapting to our specific contexts. So, too, of course, academic literacy. While this is easy enough to say, actually tweaking designs and approaches for teaching writing in Higher Education can be demanding and require creativity. The approaches presented in the papers and teaching practice pieces here all demonstrate such analytical and practical pedagogical adaptation and finely calibrated tuning.

It will come as no surprise that there are many reasons we need to adapt our academic literacy designs. Resources, student profiles, facilities, faculty training, scheduling restrictions, online learning requests, learning management systems, and students' use of generative AI may all be more or less obvious limiting or challenging conditions that we negotiate in our teaching. Other conditions affecting the teaching of writing may be less obvious. And that is the point in this issue regarding the adapting of academic literacy approaches: we can become oblivious to factors that actually affect our pedagogical designs. Therefore, the studies included in this issue are important as they bring to the fore dimensions of pedagogy design that writing teachers might overlook. This issue's contributors recognise that the creative work of adapting frameworks and the analytical work of evaluating teaching designs are core to developing education.

This issue of *JoAW* contains seven pieces: four journal articles, two teaching practice papers, and a book review. Two of the four articles, **Neilson and King** and **Stålberg**, explicitly discuss Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998), while **Colombo and Rodas** negotiate academic literacy practices such as peer review and scientific writing. **McCray and Hanks** do not use the terms 'academic literacy' or 'Academic Literacies', but this article is a case in point as the practice described is a discussion of acquiring standards of academic literacy and joining an academic community through building writing competence. Both teaching practice pieces, by **Girgensohn** and **Kotzeva and Anders**, provide important contributions to further seeing how our work can help expand our understanding of supporting students' learning and empowerment in terms of academic writing. The book review by **Namubiru** closes this *JoAW* issue by focusing on multilingual and translingual academic literacy and academic writing pedagogy.

It is important that there is considerable international spread in the issue. The seven pieces offer insights into six distinctly different national Higher Education systems and pedagogical traditions. We are fortunate to be dealing with multiple languages even if we are, for now, limited to English to share our insights. The amount of learning for us as a more contextually-informed community can be substantial, and our local designs and adaptations can only improve by our being more aware of what other contexts are like and where our students come from.

In a two-step analysis of a US-informed writing programme at a UK-based American university, **Neilson and King** take a closer look at their 'Academic Literacies Programme' to review and assess its design and impact over two data collection periods. A critical component in this programme is that it includes all students across all disciplines; it thus takes seriously the concept that Higher Education academic expectations are new and demanding for all categories of students. The high-resolution data collection and the large cohort in the baseline collection will be useful for *JoAW's* readers. Seeing results of pedagogical re-designs in the follow-up study exemplifies not only good practice in educational development, but possibly also changing conditions and student profiles. Implementing academic literacy programme designs that include all students, therefore, can be considered reasonable and a way forward in many Higher Education contexts.

McCray and Hanks provide an excellent example of assessing the impact on academic literacy of pre-sessional teaching in a UK context with L2 writers. The transition for international students to international university contexts is demanding in itself, but acquiring writing for new disciplines, new Higher Education expectations, and often in an additional language present further obstacles to learning. Therefore, looking at how the option of pre-sessional courses work and are perceived as a support model for scaffolding learning, including the learning of academic writing, is important. This study includes 14 Chinese students in a four-week pre-sessional course, and findings suggest that this design is indeed sufficient for core academic literacies in a foreign language such as argumentation, referencing and reading to develop. More importantly perhaps, the authors also show how pedagogical interventions for teaching writing need to be adapted to the student profiles we encounter in our respective teaching contexts.

In her study from a nursing education context in Sweden, **Stålberg** also looks at a scaffolding design to promote academic literacy for students. There are, however, two significant dimensions that distinguish her study from the other Academic Literacies' contexts in this issue of *JoAW*. First, the author is working within a professional education context and the added challenge that comes with motivating students to achieve academic literacy in their professional context. However, what might be more important in terms of considering the dynamics and flexibility of Academic Literacies (Lea & Street, 1998) as a model is that in this study, it is nursing education faculty who deliver writing pedagogies for students. **Stålberg's** article, therefore, also comes with a brief account of the collaboration with an educational development unit and the pedagogical training with which the nursing faculty engage. She also notes how the fact that nursing faculty deliver the writing development pedagogies means that recurring learning activities are more easily designed and implemented. Crucially, with that design follows also more frequent and situationally-adjusted feedback, which is fundamental for developing Academic Literacies.

In their article, 'Doctoral writing groups for the advancement of dissertation and publication writing', **Colombo and Rodas** offer an appealing account of writing groups for PhD students. Their three longitudinal investigations include both survey and interview data from 33 PhD students in three different writing groups in an Argentinian university. Findings support the use of writing groups not only for the immediate writing projects and thesis writing but also as safe horizontal spaces for developing academic literacy as scholars in their respective fields. We hope that this article will serve as a prompt for more research groups and graduate schools to see the value of writing groups, and, in the implementation of them, will further colleagues' understanding of the ways in which to set up doctoral writing groups for different contexts and conditions.

JoAW's teaching practice pieces are a shorter genre that have immediate pedagogical applicability. The two teaching practice papers in this issue also relate to the implicit theme of academic literacy by suggesting approaches that help empower students' academic writing.

From a German higher education perspective, **Girgensohn** offers a technique that originates in the field of Creative Writing, and which she has adapted successfully for teaching Academic Writing. The braided essay technique she exemplifies holds interesting potential for academic writing in its invite to explore divergent thinking and using disparate genres in writing processes. **Girgensohn's** piece also shows how the technique can function as a way to help students manage writing blocks, which is a tool we, as academics and writing teachers, may need for ourselves as well as for our students.

The second teaching practice piece comes out of an Armenian higher education context. **Kotzeva and Anders** suggest ways for writing teachers to use generative AI to scaffold academic literacy in terms of ethical awareness. Their focus is 'prompt engineering' in order to maintain quality in AI-use, and they show how a workshop setting allows teachers to optimise a mix of AI-use and teacher feedback. **Kotzeva and Anders** suggest writing teachers and students need to learn to better interact with and assess the information derived through generative AI.

The issue closes with a book review that we hope will generate reading and discussion, as well as follow-up articles and teaching practice pieces in *JoAW*. **Namubiru** offers an insightful review of [*Translingual Dispositions: Globalized Approaches to the Teaching of Writing*](#), edited by Frost, Kiernan and Blum (2020) and published by [the WAC Clearinghouse](#). The review emphasises how the collection helps problematise the translingual landscape and how definitions and conceptualisations of translingualism differ. While the scope of such variation might be daunting, the review shows how the collection makes the discussion about translingualism available to us as writing teachers and demonstrates how we can apply and relativise our own local contexts in the process of beginning to understand translingual academic literacy experiences and the teaching of writing.

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