Reading "Academic Writing"

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It could be any day of the week from Monday to Friday at the Institute of Education. The group of students attending the seminar might represent any one of the courses that the Institute offers within any one of its departments. The seminar would appear on each student's personal timetable as "study skills". If asked to define "study skills", I, the tutor, would give a catch-all answer: "study skills" is anything that might help students "learn how to learn" (Novak and Gowin, 1984).

Helping students "learn how to learn" is now a concern of most U.K. institutions of higher education including those responsible for teacher education. Special programmes of seminars, workshops and tutorials are provided across the U.K. throughout the calendar year. The "study skill" given most emphasis in such programmes is "academic writing", no doubt because it is on the quality of their written assignments or dissertations that students' success or failure largely turns.

Here at the Institute of Education, I, too, give most of the time available to "academic writing". My approach is pragmatic : anything that works, i.e. helps students to do better in the judgement of their main-course tutors, is worth doing. Students bring with them a diversity of difficulties which call for a range of responses. However, in conformity with current emphases on "awareness" (Gibbs, 1981; Fairclough, 1989) as important in one way or another to an improvement in student performance, I frequently refer students to published research into academic writing and sometimes make a research paper the topic for discussion in a seminar.

In my experience students respond with most interest and enthusiasm to papers that report investigations into student difficulties that they can identify with. "It's good when you can find yourself in a paper, and it's even better when there is a happy ending" is a typical response.

"Find yourself" ... "a happy ending". That is the kind of discourse I associate with responses to fiction rather than the academic paper, especially papers which are not individual case studies as most of the ones I use are not. Discussions with students have revealed that while they read - extracting the arguments, the results and conclusions - they also respond on another level : they approach the papers as possible blueprints for their own emerging biographies. Moreover, it is the extent to which a paper reflects the students' sense of their situation as students, within the particular context of the Institute of Education, and not the strength or weakness of the "grounds" and "warrant" of the researcher's "claim" (Toulmin et al., 1984), that tends to determine whether or not they adopt its recommendations. There are thus often considerable differences in students' assessments of the value to them of particular papers. Nonetheless, in my experience there has usually been a broad consensus as to the kind of student biography each paper implies.

My more formal investigation of the individual histories that students bring to texts about student difficulties and of the particular biographies that they hope to write is still in its early stages. In this paper I shall, therefore, concentrate instead on the new perception of texts about students' problems in relation to academic writing that my students' responses have pointed me towards. It is a perception that does, however, have implications for helping students "learn to learn" as I shall briefly indicate in the final part of the paper.

My starting point is in fiction, in my reading of Doris Lessing's ([1962] 1989) novel, *The Golden Notebook*. It is a cornucopia of a book which can support many different interpretations to suit different purposes. In this paper I shall read it as a metatext, a text about text. Anna, the central character, is a writer living in a particular place at a particular point in time, viz. London in the fifties. It is Anna's ambition to weave a verbal net that will lift essential meanings from the stream of lived events that constitute her experience but totality and absolute significance, the corollaries of the essential, constantly elude the mesh of her narrative. Anna marks her failures by interrupting her attempts at writing with sudden transitions, abrupt endings, or critical observations that represent her hard won

perception of her misperceptions about writing : there are no essential meanings to be captured in words, nor can the writer achieve transcendence. She is entrapped in history and that condition translated into experience means inhabiting a tower of Babel where the discourses of the times offer the writer (and the reader) conflicting and merging identities. She can make choices but they will inevitably be shaped by her history and by what time and the place make pertinent or possible. Thus, however hard she tries to be "objective", she can only fail. She cannot transcend her subjectivity.

What my students' needs had led them intuitively to perceive was that it is not only fiction that cannot be "objective" in an obsolete sense. They had found the researcher's subjectivity : the individual views of what "student" means which were contained within the frame of the conventional research format. The students' intuitive perceptions and Doris Lessing's emphasis on the text as involved in the particular meanings of time and place find their parallels and extensions in Bakhtin's theory of language. Like Lessing, Bakhtin ([1929] 1984) moves the focus of attention away from essence and onto social reality. He insists that the word cannot be abstracted from its living, historical context:

> The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process, the word does not forget its own path and completely free itself from the power of those concrete contexts into which it has entered.

It is consistent with the above representation of words as "abbreviations for past context" that Bakhtin should liken all language to speech : words carry voices that speak the history of the words' uses and interpretations : "there are no voiceless words". Words in combination, i.e., text - or to use Bakhtin's speech-analogous term, "utterance" - constitute a "definite socio-historical act" that constructs a "dialogue" between the voices of the words' many contexts.

The "dialogic" text is a key concept in Bakhtin's writings. What it has drawn my attention to is the inevitable presence in any text of ambiguity, contradiction and silence : the writer tries to construct a unitary meaning but the multivocal nature of words defeats the attempt at monologue. Every text cannot but speak to, hear and understand other meanings deriving from

the words' past contexts. Bakhtin's position is superficially similar to Derrida's rejection of "logocentrism". However, Derrida's a-historical focus implies regret at the impossibility of meaning being fully present in words whereas Bakhtin views absences as a corollary of the dialogic text that speaks finally of concrete contexts.

Lessing and Bakhtin together make it possible for me to explicate and develop my students' untheorised intuitions regarding the meanings in research papers in the following way : texts inevitably represent transformations of the material world they refer to into meanings that are both individual and social since the writer's choice of words is that selection from the meanings "out there" which his or her individual history and situation make possible and pertinent. Words are, however, as Musil ([1930] 1984) put it, a "most disorderly company"; their meanings trail other meanings associated with other contexts. The writer's selection of meanings echoes, silences or creates discords out of those other meanings, and all texts, including those which aim at academic objectivity, are polyphonic, consisting in texts within texts, and are embedded in actual contexts which enter into their meanings.

My students approached research papers as texts that offered them conceptions of what it means to be a "student". In the next part of this paper I shall attempt to show how research papers can support such readings when they are viewed as transformations of actual situations. To place academic texts in that perspective is to blur the distinction between them and fiction; neither kind of text can evade the writer's subjectivity. However, as Lessing and Bakhtin have helped me to perceive, subjectivity is not a matter of the unique individual point of view but also with the contradictions or silences or ambiguities in them that suggest a glossing over a problematic aspects in the actual context in which the writer-researchers produce their research and writing.

The three texts that I have selected represent three distinctive approaches within the literature about "academic writing"; the first derives its perspective from linguistics; the second draws on linguistics to some extent but far more on cognitive psychology; the third text illustrates the emphasis on language and power which has recently emerged out of sociolinguistics. The three texts are :

Bloor, M. and Bloor, T. (1991). "Cultural Expectations and Socio-Pragmatic Failure in Academic Writing";

Hounsell, D. (1987). "Essay Writing and the Quality of Feedback";

Ivanic, R. and Simpson, J. (1992). "Who's Who in Academic Writing?"

As I am using the texts to illustrate a focus which readers can test out for themselves on other texts, it should not matter if the texts that I have chosen are unfamiliar to readers. The following brief synopses of the overt themes are simply intended to indicate the outer frames within which the texts offer their versions of what it means to be a student.

Bloor and Bloor write about the difficulties of overseas postgraduate students. On the basis of data from questionnaires, interviews and analyses of students' academic writing they ascribe the students' problems to their misperceptions of the norms of academic communities in U.K. universities; misperceptions which Bloor and Bloor claim derive from the students' assumptions that the U.K. norms are the same as the ones in the academic cultures they come from.

Hounsell places the source of undergraduate home students' problems in relation to essay-writing in their "non-interpretive" conceptions of what they need to do in an essay. He also ascribes the students' difficulties to the failure of their tutor's feedback to bridge the gulf between the students' cognitive representations and the conception they need of essay writing as "disciplined meaning-making".

Ivanic, a tutor, and Simpson, a mature undergraduate, trace Simpson's problems to the norms of academic discourse which they characterise as representing a detached voice of authority that excludes the writer's personal identity. They examine the cast of authority figures (e.g. writers of the books Simpson consulted) that are present in a selection of Simpson's essays and note where he has managed to include himself. They argue that all students need to be encouraged to decide what kind of "You" they want to be in their essays.

Despite the differences in their theoretical perspectives and core concepts the papers are strikingly similar in one respect. They contain elements which, borrowing from Hodge (1990), I

shall term "mimetic" in that they overtly refer to extra text events and situations - in this instance, to student problems, researchers' interventions and anticipated outcomes. The relation between such mimetic elements can be described as syntagmatic i.e. as a relation in time and space. The partner of the syntagm is the paradigm. I would suggest, though, that "associative" is more effective than "paradigmatic" in epitomising the polyphony of voices which marks the transformation of the mimetic elements into the ambiguities, and silences of the dialogic text; a process that is analogous to that which the psychoanalyst witnesses when the patient articulates the multivocal associations attached to childhood events. In other words, when placed within a Bakhtinian framework "transformations" defeat system, and interpretations are constrained instead by judgements concerning the relevance of the particular memories of other contexts that words carry for the reader.

In the texts that are the subject of this paper the mimetic elements together constitute syntagms relating to the general situation and trajectory of the student vis-a-vis the socioeconomic structure : to be a student is to be in a state of transition between recognised positions in that structure. By associative logic "student" can thus connote a "rite of passage" while metaphoric elaboration can transform "rite of passage" into a "death" that should result in a "birth" after a prescribed period of time spent in preordained ways.

Anthropology can provide us with amplifications of the "prescribed period". Turner's (1974) description of the state of the "passengers" as "liminal" is particularly relevant since liminality epitomises the multivocal. On crossing the limen (threshold):

> The state of the liminar passenger becomes ambiguous, betwixt and between fixed points of classification.

Turner can also offer us the association of "liminality"" with equalitarian, undifferentiated, I - thou relationships ("communitas") which represent the rejection of the norms attached to recognised roles in the social structure.

The anthropological contexts that are evoked by "rite of passage" provide a sharper focus for a reading of the texts by Bloor and Bloor, Hounsell, and Ivanic and Simpson. That reading rests on two questions. The first question is : How does each writer view the final destination of the

"passengers"? The second question is related to the first. It is : How do the writers represent the "passage"?

To enter the texts via those questions, however, is to be drawn into "possible worlds" (Bruner, 1986). Each text "invents the university" (Bartholomae, 1985) in an individual way in that each transforms its mimetic elements into conceptions of the ideal academic journey and destination. Viewed in that light the mimetic elements - the references to actual situations, procedures and findings - acquire a new appearance and significance. As with those ambiguous figures in textbooks on perception, where the eye can perceive only one form at any one time, their shape changes from "warrant and ground" (Toulmin et al., 1984) of the writers' arguments to elements in a narrative plot.

The plots are reminiscent of the folktale in their generality, the students and their problems are presented as representative, the procedures or actions are conventional and the resolutions take the form of generalisations. However, whereas folktales usually have happy endings denoting an achieved state, the three texts under examination offer anticipated or wished for elements are most markedly transformed into conceptions of the university vis-a-vis the social structure.

Of the three papers it is only that by Bloor and Bloor which identifies the wished for university with the esoteric. Bloor and Bloor state that the most favourable outcome for the overseas student is "participation in the international academic community". Their use of the word "community" does not, however, denote an endorsement of "communitas" or "liminality". It points contradictorily to knowledge and use of the norms and registers of the academic discourses of U.K. universities which Bloor and Bloor would have overseas students "master".

Hounsell, on the other hand, does not restrict the outcome of the students' "passage" to the acquisition of specialised academic competence. He refers to the moral and intellectual revolution described by Perry. In Perry's account of the student's academic journey the ideal destination is a recognition of the speculative, provisional nature of knowledge that does not, however, exclude commitment to a set of beliefs or theories. Unlike Bloor and Bloor, Hounsell thus overtly attaches value to the tentativeness and ambiguity of liminality. However, as I shall show shortly there are contradictory elements in his text.

While Hounsell offers us a version of the wished for outcome that gives the norms of the university a relevance in the world outside its walls, Ivanic and Simpson propose resistance to such norms since they regard them as destructive of the "real person", the "YOU" that is important. However, like Hounsell's, their text contains contradictions which I shall comment on shortly.

The three texts' representations of the "passage" are closely linked to their particular inventions of the university. The relation is primarily that of means to end. Bloor and Bloor thus represent the "passage" as an initiation into the cultural do's and don'ts of the discourse communities in U.K. universities. The responsibility for that initiation is, however, placed firmly on the students' shoulders. The text abounds in the vocabulary of duty and obligation : should, should not, must, must not. Students have, as it were, to acquire good academic manners in order to be accepted as members of the university.

Hounsell, by contrast, reserves the do's and don'ts for tutors. Those students who hold non-interpretive conceptions of the essay writing task need tutors who can enter into a dialogue with them on the students' terms. Hounsell also suggests that the helpful tutor will convert essay writing from a solitary to a pedagogical activity. In short, Hounsell would appear to be recommending a movement in the direction of "communitas".

In Ivanic and Simpson's paper the "passage" takes the form of a "social drama" which is Turner's (1974) term for social situations that involve conflicts concerning status. The student, John, who stands eventually for all students' needs is locked in a conflict between an "Ego-I" which represents the university's norms of impersonality and objectivity and a "Committed-I" which denotes a real self with personal convictions. The university and its discourses are thus sites of struggle as words in the text such as "power", "control" and "resist" indicate.

The rite of passage narratives that have emerged from the three texts all point to transformations of the rite of passage syntagm as the typifying feature of the educational text. The rite of passage matches Moore's (1974) criterion. He characterises educational theory as prescriptive not descriptive; in other words, the educational text explicitly or implicitly proposes outcomes involving change both individual and collective. The differences between the narratives I have outlined above can thus be represented in terms

of the texts' conceptions of education. The emphasis in Bloor and Bloor's text on the acquisition of esoteric knowledge can then be seen to imply a view of education as initiation. Hounsell, on the other hand, conceives of the educated person as education's raison de'etre, while Ivanic and Simpson subscribe to a humanistic, person centred conception in which education consists in resisting education's conventional expressions of authority.

Up to this point my reading of the texts has concentrated on presenting each of them as coherent and unified in their transformations of the actual situations they refer to. There are, however ambiguities, contradictions and silences which take us right out of the texts and into questions about the writer-researchers' and students' actual contexts in the university.

Bloor and Bloor, who recommend that overseas students strive to be assimilated into the U.K culture, recognise that they can be accused of encouraging student alienation and mental distress. Their counter argument is that the distress caused by being outsiders in the academic community is greater by far. Bloor and Bloor use the language and metaphors of social interaction, for example, "face threatening activities" and "conform to the social rules of the academic community". Perhaps we should not be so harsh on them? What realities have been omitted from Bloor and Bloor's text? Perhaps their stance is based on their observations of the treatment of outsiders in U.K. universities? Perhaps we should regard their recommendations as possible pointers to larger issues?

Hounsell's paper, and also Ivanic's, as I have indicated, contain contradictions. The contradictions centre in the question of authority. Hounsell recommends "dialogue" between tutors and students and a relativistic approach to knowledge. Yet there is an implicit and marked symmetry between tutor and student in his text. The tutor is presented as an authority on essay writing. Students are thus pupils like those in the Socratic academy : they must be led towards the competencies that the tutor already has. Furthermore, in analysing his data Hounsell places the students' responses in dualistic categories, so editing out the ambiguities and nuances. The following comment, for example, which surely hints at a conception of "student" shaped by a personal history and carrying strong emotional overtones, is dismissed as "literalistic" : "I gathered the tutor wanted me to argue but I mean ... I wasn't going to get aggressive in an essay".

In keeping with their plea for the presence of a "real self" in academic texts, Ivanic and Simpson refer to themselves as "Roz" and "John" or "we". They choose words suggesting a personal position or conviction as often as possible : believe, think, emphasise. Finally, though, they cannot avoid the voice of assertion and the claim to "awareness". As academic writers they are required to make a "claim". However, the "claim" is ultimately in Ivanic's voice since it is she who, as we are explicitly told, provides the theory. No less than Hounsell, or even Bloor and Bloor who implicitly endorse its authority, she finally represents the university as it is and not as wishing would have it.

I stated earlier that noting the ambiguities and contradictions in the texts would point to aspects of the "real" world that had been glossed over because they were problematic. The writer-researchers offer student readers neat, coherent blueprints of what it means to be a student, but, by omission and contradiction, the texts finally "speak" with other voices. Bloor and Bloor's text raises the question of how the student outsider is generally perceived; Hounsell's paper, and also Ivanic's, points us toward the real constraints on "liminality" and "communitas" in the actual setting of the university.

In finally taking me back to the "real" context in which I work, my analysis of the three texts has reminded me of the large and difficult issues to do with authority, prejudice, belonging and identity which I can keep hidden behind fine rhetoric but which may be as important to my student's learning to learn as their acquisition of specific "study skills". I am left with the realization that in offering students a conception of "academic writing" I am presenting them with the meanings I attach to "student". Furthermore, my impulse towards a unified "text" may produce transformations that edit out dilemmas and complexities in the lived social reality. It could also lead me to ignore the diverse histories formed in diverse social contexts which give words the particular "voices" that my students hear. I cannot finally simply hand students the meanings that I associate with "student", and more than they can hand me theirs, but in that understanding may lie the beginning of our hearing one another.

My starting point was in fiction and so is my conclusion. I shall leave the last word to Doris Lessing. *The Golden Notebook* has an outer frame in the form of the conventional novel with its over-determined patterns of meaning. Doris

Lessing tells us in an introductory preface that *The Golden Notebook* breaks that form; it points to "all that complexity" that the outer novel omits. In this paper I have tried to indicate some of the complexity which "academic writing" can edit out.

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TEACHER EDUCATION FOR VALUES EDUCATION: IS THERE A WAY FORWARD UNDER CURRENT CONSTRAINTS?

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How can teacher education best prepare teachers to contribute to values education in schools?

If this was ever a question that could be asked and answered in the abstract, or with reference to some postulated ideal situation, it is not so now. I am raising and suggesting an answer to the question in the context of recent developments in education in Britain; but since those recent developments are by no means unique to Britain, the discussion may well be of broader relevance too.

The context, then, in which I am raising the question is one of increasing political control, at a national level, over both the curriculum of schools, and the form and content of teacher education itself. Several developments have combined, in Britain, which make it difficult to be optimistic about the future of any serious values education in schools; but at the same time, some opportunities have been opened up which could be grasped by teacher educators.

I shall set the context first in terms of the school curriculum itself; then in terms of developments in teacher education.

When the National Curriculum for England and Wales was first sketched out in 1987, one of the many negative reactions to it was the thought that it would involve little more than the transmission of a predetermined syllabus in each of a defined list of subjects; possibilities for pupils' own involvement in their learning, for their exploration of and critical reflection on matters concerning their own lives - for, indeed, the whole area which often goes under the label of Personal and Social Education - looked distinctly limited. Five years later, after many syllabus materials and guidelines have appeared, there has been no lack of reference to the need for pupils to engage with questions of values; on the other hand, there are indications that, at least in the view of government, there is no need to take these references too seriously.

There has been room for such discrepancies to arise because of the distinction between what is statutory and what exists merely in guidelines;

and because of the complexity in the way in which both statutory provisions and guidelines are arrived at. In some cases, syllabus proposals which gave some emphasis to questions of values (e.g. in the treatment of environmental questions as they arise both in geography and in science) have been watered down before reaching their final statutory form; in other cases there was never any intention that certain proposals should have statutory status. At the time of the Education Reform Act, 1988, a National Curriculum Council (NCC) was set up, with a remit to make recommendations concerning the whole curriculum. Part of the NCC's activity has been to recommend a set of cross-curricular themes, and to issue guidelines for them. More will be said about these themes below; but one thing which they are held to have in common is that they provide an opportunity for the exploration of values and beliefs. The provision of these cross-curricular themes within a school's curriculum, however, is not required by law.

The position at the time of writing, then, is that a pile of documents exists, within which quite frequent references are made to value issues; but how far the aspirations behind these references will be realised in schools is quite another question. It is also true that the aspiration that questions of values should enter into the school curriculum is often not made very specific. Statements such as the following, from Guidance documents on cross-curricular themes issued by the NCC, are typical:

a. [Pupils should] 'Discuss moral values and explore those held by different cultures and groups' NCC document, *Curriculum Guidance 5, Health Education,* p. 16.

b. 'Schools should ensure, where relevant, that there is a balanced presentation of opposing views. Pupils should be encouraged to explore values and beliefs, both their own and those of others.' NCC document, *Curriculum Guidance 4, Education for Economic and Industrial Understanding,* p. 3.