

3 Creating Identities in an Intertextual World

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Introduction

For students, universities open new worlds of knowledge and culture. Universities open new identities as professionals, citizens, and members of society – local and global. The worlds opened are richly and deeply saturated with texts of all sorts. To take action and form identities within these intertextual worlds, students need to learn to draw on and address relevant texts at the same time as they stake out their own position in writing. The *intertext* (that web of texts that surround, are invoked by, give meaning to, or are otherwise relevant to any new text) establishes a virtual world of meaning upon which writers create and innovate to make their contribution. This is as true for the emerging multi-media designer as the emerging scientist, as true for the emerging journalistic blogger as the emerging business executive. Such is the nature of the modern world where writing has become the communicative infrastructure of major social institutions, transforming purely local lives into ones played out on worldwide stages mediated by texts.

While high school has prepared students within a contained literacy world, the university transitions students into the powerful

knowledge, financial, and professional systems within which they will carry out the work of societies, cultures, and economies. In a high school class, a single textbook may have defined all relevant knowledge and established all relevant perspectives; the student in writing needs only to follow the path prescribed by the textbook and reinforced by the instructor. Academic writing at the university, however, challenges students to innovate meanings and plans, to begin to form the identities upon which to build careers. Students need to encounter and evaluate multiple conflicting texts with disparate knowledge in order to come to their own conclusions that carry discussions and projects forward. Teaching reading and writing at the university is more than teaching a contained set of skills; it is teaching students how to claim their place and accomplish meaningful actions in the worlds they are growing into. Teachers need to invent the environments and tasks that will nurture the students' invention of themselves as powerful academic writers.

The Creativity and Challenges of Writing

Every act of writing is an act of creating – bringing a new artifact into the world, even if it is only a Facebook post. Writing creates new meanings through cobbling together pieces of language, familiar to the reader from other texts, other utterances. The new act of writing draws on and evokes, either explicitly or implicitly, the wealth of prior texts. These texts can be drawn on simply for their language, but the ideas or descriptions or moods of those prior texts may also be reprised. More explicitly, the new text may rely on claims made previously or answer directly to the arguments proposed in related texts, sometimes called the literature on the subject. A Facebook post helps create an identity, a presence, a set of relations, and a set of facts about us. Each post asserts a place among the many prior posts of the author and posts in the circle of friends. The posts may not claim to be fictional (though they might) and may not draw on the literary canon for allusions,

genres, or models (though they might, but they could equally draw on current music lyrics or news headlines or YouTube links). But the lack of literary aspirations does not make them any less meaningful accomplishments of the language arts, asserting the writer's presence, meaning, value, and actions in a social world of importance to the writer. In fact, representing the world as it is, drawing on the actual material of the world with accuracy, responsibility, and purpose draws on arts of language distinct from the ones that make for successful fabulation. Further, finding how one wants to represent oneself to the people with whom one maintains real and concrete relations calls on arts of language different from those of the literary performer.

So what does Facebook have to do with university writing? One doesn't need a university education to create an effective presence on Facebook (though we should remember that Facebook grew out of a closed university social communication application.) Simply put, when students enter the university they step into expanded worlds of knowledge that are closely attached to the professional worlds of practice they desire to contribute to, and to create careers and identities within. The worlds of knowledge of their high schools were smaller, contained by the narrow selectivity of curriculum and exams, and embodied in a small number of textbooks. The knowledges of the university are open-ended, extended into all the domains of the world, and ever changing with access through the full resources of the library and internet.

It is easy for the new university students to lose their way in the ever-expanding universe of print and digital texts. Perhaps even more challenging, the identities and roles of students to be expressed through writing change (or at least should change) radically in the shift from high school to the university (see Sullivan and Tinberg, 2006; Sullivan, Tinberg, and Blau, 2010). Secondary students as writers are largely test takers, reproducing received knowledge from textbooks, with little expectation of originality or fresh thought, though if they are lucky high school may offer a few beginning opportunities for personal expression, critical reasoning,

and social engagement. Over the years of a university education students increasingly need to become familiar with and draw on extensive bodies of knowledge to carry out new tasks, complete protoprofessional projects, and build identities as creative, intelligent, analytical, knowledgeable professionals – sharing all the competencies expected of practitioners but also asserting unique perspectives and ideas, based on deepening understanding of knowledge of their chosen fields (for examples of studies of writing at the university, see Carroll, 2002; Herrington and Curtis, 2000; Thaiss and Zawacki, 2006).

Learning Academic Writing

Much of the student writer's growth is tied to changing knowledge of the literature of the field, then purposeful synthesis and criticism of that knowledge to come to fresh conclusions (for practical curriculum to achieve this, see Bazerman, 1995). The maturing student's presence or identity in the field then depends on how well s/he asserts her/his views with force and clarity, in ways convincing to knowledgeable practitioners. This assertion embodies representation of data and evidence, which needs to be collected and reported in credible ways, consistent with other representations in the professional literature. The assertion may also involve plans and designs, again intelligible, credible, and valuable according to the standards already expressed in the field. Any variation from the standards and knowledge already in the field needs vigorous and credible argument for how and why one varies. These disciplinary standards are typically first made visible to students through the assessments and comments of instructors in class dialog, in giving assignments and criteria, and in assessments and comments in response to student writing. Typically these comments become more disciplinarily focused as students move towards the upper years of their undergraduate program. In postgraduate years the advisor may ventriloquate the critiques that may be made of

students' claims by others in the field (Paré, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine, 2009), but also students may face disciplinary standards directly as they begin to attend departmental colloquia and major conferences and as they attempt to publish in disciplinary and professional venues.

Students typically are introduced to the texts, ideas, theories, and methods of representing data of a field in their coursework in the various subject areas, and then in their writing, they learn to reason and make arguments on the bases of these resources. These are highly creative acts for them, but highly focused and constrained by the materials they are working with, the genres they express themselves through, and the criteria of evaluation they need to meet. Yet in those respects it is hardly different than the young poet writing love sonnets or the painter doing large landscapes in oils. Each field of creation has criteria of truth and insight as well as of compositional coherence. Although emotional resonance in lyric poetry or naturalistic grandeur in landscape painting are different from fresh observation based on precision and accuracy of measurement in geology, they each have their discipline and creativity. Similarly, stanzaic unity or compositional focus and coherence are no doubt different from logical relations among theory, method, findings, and results, but they each establish expectations of larger organization.

Also, we need to remember that students are novices in these genres, so that acts of great creativity and imagination for them may seem familiar and pedestrian to our jaded eyes, but so might most youthful attempts at poetry or high school art exercises. Although genres may be defined in a number of ways (see Bawarshi and Reiff, 2010, for a discussion of the varieties of approaches to understanding genre), I here adopt an approach to genre that sees them as attributions by readers that allow them to make sense of utterances as typified within typified situations; this view recognizes the constant evolution and fluidity of genres and the way genres facilitate the creation of locally meaningful and novel utterances. Thus, the genres students encounter in school are not

only regulated forms to be fulfilled, but opportunities to develop ideas, meaning, and styles of thinking.

Writing with Data and Concepts in an Oceanography Course

So let's see what this intellectual development within school-assigned genres looks like in actuality. A number of years ago I participated in a series of investigations of writing in a general education oceanography course. The professor of the course wanted the students to come to understand that science was based on arguments drawing on theory and using disciplinary evidence. In one major assignment, after students read the textbook presentation on plate tectonic theory, listened to several lectures on the topic, and engaged in related class discussions and laboratory exercises, they were asked to use the standard database of geologic events in order to identify features and argue how they supported plate tectonic theory. As part of the assignment they had to select three profiles (or point to point slices) of sea floor depth that would isolate and define features in a small geographic area. It is like trying to see an object in a room from the outside if you can only view it through three narrow slit windows. This is not a trivial task, as strategically locating the profiles (that is, where do you put the "windows" to get a good view of the object?) was important to identifying the features with clarity and finding features that could be argumentatively linked with the theory. Looking at examples from the literature as well as examples discussed in the lab manual and classes would help the students identify strategies for locating profile cuts. Then there were a number of interpretive creative acts involved in seeing the profiles as actual features, and then locating the features as part of processes that would best be understood by the dominant plate-tectonic theory, presented in their textbooks, handouts, and other class assigned readings.

The first time my colleagues collected data from the students' written assignments and analyzed it, the difference between the successful papers and the less successful were obvious. Successful papers created a tight and dense network of statements that went from detailed concrete observations, through identification of features, processes, and theories, while the less successful papers were missing claims at different levels and had few identifiable semantic connections among the claims. As a result, writers of the less successful papers were unable to develop and support ideas, and were more closely tied to textbook statements randomly inserted into their papers. To analyze the kinds of claims and their connections, we identified a task and subject-specific categories of epistemic levels of each claim. These epistemic levels (or levels of abstraction from the data, based on the theoretical constructs of the field of oceanography) were defined in consultation with the instructor and through examination of the student scripts, as evaluated by the instructor and the teaching assistants. These reflected the specific intellectual goals of the task, embedded within the course and the discipline (see Kelly and Takao, 2002, for further details). Specifically the epistemic levels consisted of:

- I. data charts, and other representations of untransformed data
- II. topographical features
- III. relative geographical relations
- IV. presenting geological theoretical claims
- V. propositions in the form of general theoretical claims
- VI. general propositions describing geological processes and referencing definitions, experts, and textbooks (Kelly and Takao, 2002: 322)

The lowest level claims were based on concrete observations and measurements recorded in professional databases. Each level required some further abstraction or inference. That is, features were identified by the relation of data points (level II), and then features would be placed in relation to each other (III). Then, the relation

of features would provide the basis of making theoretical claims about the research site (IV), and representing these theoretical claims as more general propositions (V), and then relating claims to processes explained by plate-tectonic theory (VI). The next time the course was taught, students were introduced to this framework showing how to make concrete and abstract statements at different epistemic levels so as to tie claims at different levels together. That time, the student papers were more uniformly successful, but now difficulties arose in some students making their claims in random places throughout their papers, so they were unable to develop their arguments clearly and fully, as the reasoning was being presented in disrupted ways, not in a coherent order. So our research team performed a move analysis on a selection of the student papers to confirm how the more coherent papers differed from the less coherent ones. Move analysis (first developed by John Swales) is a method of identifying standard rhetorical moves made within a genre (for further details, see Swales, 1990).

Prespecified sections
of "technical paper:"

Rhetorical moves within paper sections:

Abstract / Introduction	—	{	Stating the problem Setting central constructs in thesis statement Stating central thesis
Methods	—	{	Description of data set
Observations	—	{	Identifying specific feature(s) Providing evidence specified feature(s)
Interpretations	—	{	Describing geological processes as analytical method Abstracting geological processes from data Describing evidence for geological processes
Conclusion	—	{	Restating the problem Tying evidence and argument together with central thesis Providing coda

(from Kelly and Bazerman, 2003: 41)

The next time the course was taught we introduced the students to the above model, and students' writing again improved. By this point most students had a full range of epistemic levels of claims and were able to make coherent arguments that made theoretical sense of the data (Kelly, Bazerman, Skukauskaite and Prothero, 2010). Then, in our next investigation, we found that each section of the paper had characteristic patterns of epistemic levels. That is, the introduction and discussion sections tended to have statements of higher abstraction and theoretical representation (epistemic level V or VI) while the methods section tended to have concrete statements of level I. Observations and interpretation sections were in the middle with level III and IV statements, with interpretations tending to be at a slightly higher overall level than observations. To fulfill the assignment students had to think through and make claims at all these levels in the appropriate sections of the paper and make reasoned connections among them, dictated by the expectations of the genre and structured by the organization of the genre. In a further study we examined lexical cohesion, and this further clarified the pattern by which theoretical and more concrete terms were distributed throughout the papers in order to build elements of the argument and tie them together (Kelly and Bazerman, 2003; Kelly, Bazerman, Skukauskaite, and Prothero, 2010). In so doing they would be seeing how concrete observable data could be made sense of through tying data to the theoretical terms developed in the disciplinary literature. Thus, they saw how experience becomes inscribed in the world of disciplinary meanings.

Growth in Thinking through Writing in a Teacher Education Program

Learning these disciplinary forms of representing data, ideas, and their relationships, including the typical phrasing as well as organizing arguments, not only taught students how to meet disciplinary expectations; these forms of expression also expanded the

student's expressive power, as they were in a position to make more powerful and effectively original arguments. The more the students understood the constraints of the genre, the more they could use those constraints to develop their own thinking and assert their own identities, as I explored with some associate researchers in another set of studies based on our teacher education program. This program had its primary goal to develop reflective understanding of classroom events, student learning and actions, and teacher choices, so that the teacher candidates would continually examine their own practices and develop reflective habits to help them continue developing across their careers, long after they had completed the program.

The teacher education program has a series of assignments that direct the teacher candidates' attention to details of students and classroom events. The major assignment of the fall term was a detailed examination of students who seem to be avoiding reading. During the winter teacher candidates needed to assemble a teaching portfolio, with commentary and reflections on a video of their teaching a lesson. Finally, in the spring, teacher candidates had to complete an action research thesis, based on data collection throughout the year and constant rethinking of fundamental questions about teaching in light of the evidence from their classes. These three major assignments (case study of low-reading students, teaching portfolio, and action research thesis) each asked teacher candidates to make observations and reason about them in order to increase their understanding of teaching and learning in concrete classroom situations. We found that the genres they wrote in and each of the sections of each of the genres evoked specific kinds of thinking, posing specific intellectual problems for students to solve, which then advanced their own thinking and emerging identities as teachers. That is, even within a single genre, each of the typified parts of the genre had its own cognitive work: in order to complete the total intellectual work of the genre, the students had to complete many reasoning sub-tasks within the separate sections of the assignment. Further, as teacher candidates gained practice in

these forms of writing requiring reflection on the classroom, their ability to make sophisticated judgments improved.

Through a combination of ethnographic observation, interviewing, and grounded analysis of texts, we developed a subject- and program-specific set of codes to identify the kind of thinking evoked by each assignment and each section, in support of the developmental expectations of the program. The codes reflecting the least developed thinking according to program goals attributed student and teacher behavior as based on fixed or prior characteristics (e.g. “[I hoped] he would be encouraged to make mistakes, but this seems to be an unlikely outcome in light of his insecurity.”) and moral obligations (e.g. “I was disappointed with his apathetic response to reading.”), while mid-level codes identified statements recognizing that classroom behavior reflected many influences, reactivity to immediate events, and complexities of situation. The codes reflecting the most developed thinking according to program goals identified statements recognizing learning came in the students’ response to dynamic situations and that both students and teachers were attempting to make sense of the unfolding situation to make choices about actions (Bazerman, Simon, Ewing, and Pieng, forthcoming).

We also discovered that discussing and citing their disciplinary reading had a strong effect on these future teachers’ thinking. We found that when teacher candidates cited the professional literature on teaching and literacy, they overwhelmingly used the sources to identify concepts that helped them make sense of their experience, and were thus creating their perspective on what happens in a classroom through the lenses provided by the concepts in their readings. We also found that the thinking expressed in the sentences which included citations (or which continued discussion of a text cited in a neighboring sentence) was at a higher level than thinking in sentences not connected to references. And over the sequence of assignments, the teacher candidates became better able to engage in extended discussions of their readings and maintaining continuous

passages of higher order reasoning (Bazerman, Simon, and Pieng, forthcoming).

Use of reading, just as defining generic expectations, did not serve to homogenize teacher candidates, but rather provided them advanced tools to create their own thinking and develop their own teaching identities. Academic writing provided the space in which to forge their teaching identities and ways of approaching professional problems and choices. The theses they produced were more thoughtful, individual, and distinctive than their work when they first arrived. One developed a complex view of the relationship of responsibility and motivation, while another developed a finely tuned understanding of student difficulties and challenges. They each became their own kind of teacher in this process, finding their own ways of thinking through the problems of creating a successful classroom.

Implications for Teaching

So what does this mean for where and how we teach writing and what kinds of programs we develop?

First, we can see all forms of writing as potentially creative, developing new meanings for students. Even as we introduce them to and give them practice in standardized forms, students need to see these as tools to express ideas they want to express, to explore new thoughts, to develop unique perspectives and messages. We should treat genre as an opportunity space for expression. The genres we assign provide invitations to express new contents, represented in new ways, and pieced together in new kinds of coherence – all to foster new thought and cognitive development. So in assigning students to write in various genres we should be mindful of which ones might produce the most appropriate challenges to advance student thinking in our courses. Also, in assisting students to write in each genre we should not only help them to adhere to the proper form but to build those thoughts that will accept the invitation of

the genre and take advantage of the opportunity the genre provides to grow intellectually and as expressive people.

By providing pathways through disciplinary-influenced but developmentally appropriate genres, we can help students see that their unique thoughts and identities can be developed within rich and complex communities with already substantial knowledge. Of course, we must be careful not to overwhelm them with too difficult and extensive readings and knowledge, but we should not constrain their intellectual worlds. Rather, we should bring students from the very beginning of their higher education experience into dialog with the resources of those domains of knowledge that excite and engage them, with the engagement growing in depth and complexity as students progress in their studies, coming to understand and participate more fully in the worlds of their chosen disciplines. The intensity of engagement with literate communities of thought and knowledge is as important as the details of which area they engage in.

We should also provide tools for them to express deeper understanding of what they are reading, so that they can evaluate and discuss their responses, and can transform what they have read for their own purposes. These tools of intertextuality go from the simple textual practices of quotation, citation, and commenting structures to purposeful paraphrase, directed synthesis, and strategic rhetorical deployment within larger arguments. Typically, when students first are asked to make reference to other texts, they are likely only to use extensive quotations with cursory introductions and little discussion afterwards. In short, they hand the voice of their text over to the person they are quoting. As students learn the tools of integrating reference to others' ideas within the body of their own texts (by well-introduced paraphrase, summary, or simply by naming an idea, followed by a discussion of the importance of the referenced material for their own argument or analysis) students retain control of what the text is stating. Similarly, when students start needing to reference multiple texts, at first they may create disjunct pastiches jumping from the voice and argument of one

author to another. Students need to learn the skills of showing the relationship of one author's ideas to another, and then placing them within the students' own purposes and argument. Even if a text requires extensive quotations from multiple authors, the quotations should be selective and purposeful, and framed within a discussion showing why the readers need to pay attention to the quotations and what they have to do with each other and the larger purposes of the text. The writer then still remains in charge as the orchestrator of multiple voices.

Of course, as students advance from first-year general education students to advanced students in their chosen disciplines, the problem of which area of engagement to work with is solved, in a way. But students still need further development of their literacy skills to bring them into deeper engagement with their professional tasks and roles while working within the constraints of their disciplines: addressing more difficult readings, synthesizing larger amounts of information and varieties of texts, developing critical stances, deploying the resources of the fields for their own ends, and developing their own statements incorporating evidence they have gathered and resolving problems and projects of their choosing. These daunting tasks suggest that literacy support does not end with first year courses, and would benefit from a continuous plan of literacy support from first year through graduation, and even in post graduate studies, as students must produce their dissertations, theses, and publishable research and other articles (for examples of how this has been pursued in various regions, see Bazerman, Little, Chavkin, Fouquette, Bethel, and Garufis, 2005; Castello and Donahue, 2012; Natale, 2012; Thaiss, Bräuer, Carlino, Ganobcsik-Williams, and Sinha, 2012).

For us as scholars the role of language in engaging with others, with the world, and with the world of knowledge is a theoretical research issue. For students it is the practical path they will follow as professionals and citizens in a knowledge, information society. Their life trajectories will enter ever more deeply into existing richly built symbolic environments which they need to learn to

navigate, engage in, and help build further. Our role as teachers is to give them the tools and encourage the dispositions to head out on that exciting, creative journey.

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