

Disciplinarity, knowledge, language and the multilingual student

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Outline



- The changing profile of higher education
- The situation with transnational students
- Critical Literacies
- Study findings



The changing profile of education: transnational education

- 41% worldwide increase between 2000 - 2004
- Tenfold increase in Australia between 1985 - 2005
- By 2005, 18% of all tertiary students in Australia were transnational students

(ABS 2007)



Studies on L1 and L2 writing

Most studies focus on:

- features of L1 and L2 writing (e.g. Silva 1993 and Thonus (2004)
- writing centres
- with less focus on genre learning



Few genre studies comparing native and multilingual speakers

Tardy (2006)

- “lack of comprehensive synthesis and comparison of genre learning of L1 and L2 writers...” (80)
- there were no explicit comparisons between L1 and multilingual writers
- studies on multilingual writers relate to language not disciplinarity



The “wrong knowers”

(Maton 2004)



- Not poor literacy skills but “pragmatic, utilitarian and careerist” (Maton 2004)
- A cultural deficit perspective (Ninnes et al. 1999)
- A language deficit perspective (Lea and Street 1998)



Critical Academic Literacies

Lea and Street (1998)

- Conflicting requirements for writing on different courses and these were “left implicit”
- Epistemological and methodological issues expressed as surface features
- This confusion led to student difficulties as they lacked familiarity with the disciplinary underpinnings



Longitudinal study



Research focus:

- differences between previous and current education systems
- generic academic writing skills
- academic and disciplinarity issues
- staff and student relationships



Student profile

Student	Country	Course
Eva (25)	China	T & I/MIR
Amy (23)	Australia	MIR
Helen (35)	India	M.Primary Ed
Hanako (27)	Japan	M.Ap Ling



Past and current experiences

Student's country	Australia
Lecture	Lecture and tutorial (except Ling)
Text book	Multiple texts
Exam and few written assessments	Exams and many written assessments
Reliance on teacher	Student autonomy



Generic academic writing and referencing skills

- Despite the significant academic differences, students had no problems with language, writing, essay organisation, plagiarism and referencing



Disciplinary knowledge, genres and disciplinarity

- Despite good generic writing skills, transnational students faced some difficulties and anxiety over disciplinary genres



Discourses issues: Eva and Amy

- Eva's concerns included: disciplinary language, genres and cross-cultural differences with teachers
- Amy had no similar concerns, but acknowledged the difficulties faced by transnational students



Discourse issues: Helen and Hanako

- Both students utilised their previous professional knowledge and disciplinarity
- Yet they also struggled with some specific genres.



Conclusion



- Not adversely affected by previous educational systems
- Good writing and language skills
- More disciplinary guidance needed for specific genres



Recommendations



- Explicit teaching of disciplinary literacies
- Communication between writing courses and departments
- Material to take into account student background and knowledge
- Clear criteria and good feedback

