

# Interdiscursive collaboration in public relations contexts<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Interdiscursive collaborative construction of professional genres (Bhatia, 2004 & 2010; Bremner, 2006; Smart, 2006) within the framework of “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) can be viewed as a useful instrument for developing writing expertise to initiate novice writers into the conventions of corporate writing. Drawing on evidence from public relations (PR) writing contexts in Hong Kong, the paper focuses on the dynamics of participation in collaborative PR practice and on the deconstruction of the collaborative process as evidenced in the deconstruction of various drafts (from brainstorming to the final product) and through the perceptions of some of the key PR practitioners in the industry. The paper will have implications for our understanding of interdiscursivity in genre theory (Bhatia, 2010) and for the collaborative writing process within the academy as well as in the workplace.

**Keywords:** interdiscursive collaboration, genre theory, community of practice, writing, public relations.

## Resumen

### *Colaboración interdiscursiva en el ámbito de las relaciones públicas*

La construcción de los géneros profesionales mediante la colaboración interdiscursiva (Bhatia, 2004 y 2010; Bremner, 2006; Smart, 2006) en el marco de las “comunidades de práctica” (Lave y Wenger, 1991) puede entenderse como un instrumento útil gracias al cual es posible desarrollar cierta experiencia en los procesos de escritura iniciando a los escritores noveles en las convenciones de la escritura corporativa. Basándose en las evidencias obtenidas en el ámbito de la escritura en el contexto de las relaciones públicas en Hong Kong, el presente

trabajo se centra en la dinámica de participación en la práctica colaborativa en dicho ámbito así como en la deconstrucción del proceso colaborativo tal y como se demuestra en la deconstrucción de diversos borradores (desde la tormenta de ideas inicial hasta que se obtiene el producto final) y mediante las percepciones de algunos de los expertos clave en el sector de las relaciones públicas. El presente trabajo tendrá repercusiones en lo que respecta a nuestra comprensión de la interdiscursividad en la teoría de géneros (Bhatia, 2010) y al proceso de escritura tanto en el ámbito académico como ocupacional.

**Palabras clave:** colaboración interdiscursiva, teoría de géneros, comunidad de práctica, escritura, relaciones públicas.

## Introduction

Professional discourse, particularly in Public Relations (PR) contexts, often presents significant challenges for the development of writing expertise in the academy. Recent research in critical genre theory (Bhatia, 2004 & 2010; Bremner, 2006 & 2010; Smart, 2006) indicates that part of the reason for some of the difficulties could be attributed to lack of understanding of the real nature of professional discourse as an interdiscursive collaborative phenomenon rather than a simple exercise in discursive construction of professional genres as such. Drawing on some of the research findings from a larger project on collaborative writing in the creative communication industry in Hong Kong, this paper identifies two related aspects of discursive practices in public relations contexts, that is “interdiscursivity” (as used in Bhatia, 2010) and the process of interdiscursive collaboration, and illustrates how these discursive processes are used to achieve professional goals in public relations companies in Hong Kong. The study will have implications for developing writing expertise to initiate novice writers into the conventions of corporate writing, particularly in PR contexts. The evidence comes from public relations writing contexts in Hong Kong, particularly from the analyses of various drafts and the finished products, interdiscursive collaborative contributions by the participants involved in specific public relations tasks, and interviews with experienced PR professionals in several Hong Kong PR firms. More generally, the paper brings into focus some of the important contributing factors and processes to the construction of specialist PR genres, with particular emphasis on the dynamics of participation in collaborative PR practice, highlighting the complexities of the collaborative process at work, and compares them with what goes on in the academy.

## Design of the study

As briefly mentioned above, data for the study comes from an ethnographic investigation conducted over two years (2008-2010) focusing on the perceptions of PR managers in Hong Kong regarding their use of English in the PR industry. The aim was to use some of the key aspects of what Geertz (1973) called interpretative ethnography, as demonstrated in Smart's (1998a, 1998b & 2006) doctoral work, where he studied professional banking practices in a Canadian bank. We decided to use those ethnographic procedures that we thought would make it possible for us to understand and describe what was happening in professional contexts in a range of PR firms in Hong Kong. The procedures used were extensive semi-structured interviews of key professionals in the PR industry, participant-in-action observations, discourse and genre analyses of documents (drafts as well as finished products), researcher diaries, etc., all of which allowed us to get involved in several PR research sites through observation and participation, and to produce what Geertz (1973: 3) calls a "thick description" of how professionals perform their day-to-day tasks, which also provided us with opportunities to catch professionals in action at specific moments in time and space, and understand their practice.

The data comprised several hour-long open-ended interviews with more than 15 PR executives working in 10 public relations firms (six small and medium-sized firms, and four large multinationals established in Hong Kong and the Asian region). The 15 PR executives, who made available their narratives of experience in the PR industry, consisted of both local Hong Kong Chinese (6) and expatriates from England, Australia and North America (9). The interview data were transcribed and analyzed in order to identify some of the important themes emerging from their perceptions. We also conducted follow-up interviews to seek their clarifications, wherever considered necessary.

In the course of the investigation, a research assistant was also placed as an intern in some of these firms for a period of three months each, during which time she conducted participant observation, collected texts related to the campaigns in which she was involved, recorded various formal and informal interactions in the workplace, and kept a detailed reflective diary about her experiences and her ongoing socialization into the corporate cultures of the companies in which she was placed. This ethnographic data was supplemented by more formal interviews with various staff working in

these firms, including senior managers, novice copywriters and consultants. One of the reasons for undertaking this study was to investigate the real nature of writing practices in the PR industry as compared with what was happening in the academy, especially in professional communication classrooms<sup>2</sup>. We thought that it would be interesting to compare the pedagogical context with the real professional context in the workplace in which students are often required to perform in professional communication activities. Over the years we had discovered that the pedagogical tasks in the academy resulted in incoherent and fragmented texts as a result of the requirement of equal efforts on the part of participating students, which often lead to unequal contributions. Moreover, there was little perception of learning among participants, as most of them treated communication tasks as part of an assessment exercise. Compared to this, the professional PR context appeared to be very different, in that, it clearly indicated that unequal rights in PR contexts lead to equal contributions; often the complete drafting being done by one individual with frequent use of templates, which are positively discouraged in the academy because of concerns about plagiarism. Unlike collaborative writing tasks in the academy, there was a conscious effort on the part of senior PR executives to encourage learning from collaboration.

We shall now give substance to these claims by discussing some of the key findings of the study focusing on the interdiscursive nature of PR discourse and its collaborative construction, with particular emphasis on the collaborative process, its creativity, the use of templates, and revision as a learning process.

## Key findings

### Interdiscursivity in PR discourse

Professional discourse is generally rich in interdiscursivity (Bhatia, 2008, 2010 & 2012). Writing in the professions, especially in PR contexts, is essentially an interdiscursive phenomenon, which takes place in socio-pragmatic space (Bhatia, 2010) where professional identities and, more specifically, public relations are negotiated through a dynamic range of professional genres in order to achieve specific professional goals and objectives. One of the reasons for this interdiscursive character of professional writing seems to be the consequence of widespread

collaboration within and across specific communities of practice (Faigley & Miller, 1982; Ede & Lunsford, 1985 & 1990; Freedman & Adam, 1996). Colen and Petelin (2004: 136) rightly point out that “[c]ollaborative writing is pervasive in the contemporary corporate workplace. North American research reports that nine out of ten business professionals produce some of their documents as part of a team”. In the PR industry this kind of collaborative effort involves a variety of clients and PR specialists in a specific firm, at one level, and within a specific firm itself, different members of the team are involved in the designing and writing of a particular document. This aspect of interdiscursive collaboration in the construction of PR genres, whether they are company and client meetings, advertisements, press releases, web designs, or proposals seems to be a reflection of Bakhtin’s (1991) assertion that all texts are essentially heteroglossic in nature. Like Bakhtin, Kristeva (1980) also believed that all texts are constructed from preceding and anticipated texts, and every new text negotiates the textual voices of others before it. In a similar manner, Foucault (1972) also maintains that texts are the consequence of what he calls discursive formations, which is echoed in Fairclough (1995), where he claims that interdiscursivity highlights the normal heterogeneity of texts in being constituted by combinations of diverse genres and discourses transforming the past or prior texts into the present. Scollon (2001) also reiterates that the combination of genres, registers, situations and communities of practice are appropriated as significant aspects of mediated action. More recently, Bhatia (2010) provides a comprehensive view of interdiscursivity in genre theory, especially in the context of professional genre, viewing it as creative appropriation or manipulation of prior formulations of discursive actions within and across professional practices and cultures to construct new and creative forms of professional genres.

### **Collaboration in the pr industry**

Collaboration in the PR industry is both involvement and disengagement that largely depends on one’s ability to work in a team. The industry seems to put a high premium on teamwork because it is an important aspect of the discursive process in this industry, which often runs on a tight schedule. A senior executive from a medium-sized PR company<sup>3</sup>, talking about the importance of teamwork has this to say on the termination of an employee:

Because ... the gentleman ... who worked on one of ... the last speeches with

our ... client, eh was working with this for nine months, and then in the end I decided to terminate ... his contract. And I would say third of the reason for that termination was the inability to work within the team.

He continued,

We really need ... everyone to be able to work together ... and ... [be] constructively critical ... of everyone's output. I suppose in that sense we're sort of quite flat in terms of the ... structure of the organization ...

Teamwork is also important because it brings into focus different kinds of abilities that participants have which contribute to the discursive process in an efficient way. Another senior executive from a medium-sized PR company points out:

... in terms of the whole collaborative process ... you can get ... too close to the document. You start missing things ... You know you've been working on it ... for example, in terms of style...my writing style ... tend to be sort of quite long sentences. The words are fine, but that's long sentences. And we all have our little talents and ... we need to ... put it through a hot wash. So ... everything is ... extremely collaborative and ... we might ... at a certain point, if someone's not been working on the document at all, that's quite useful by the time you get to draft ... ten ... depending on what the client wants.

One thing specifically distinctive about teamwork in the PR industry that is remarkably different from teamwork in the academy is the nature and extent of credit given to individual participants in the team. As mentioned earlier, teamwork in the academy works on some kind of democratic principle, that every member is expected to contribute equally to the collaborative process and to get equal credit, partly due to the fact that the discursive task is viewed as part of an assessment process. In the PR industry, on the other hand, it is never a question of who does what and how much; it is important to finish the job effectively to turn it into a pragmatic success. Another senior executive of a PR firm highlighted the nature of partnership in the collaborative process as follows, particularly looking at who contributes what at what point:

It definitely won't be one person writing one section, because the writing style of each person is different. Combining different people's work may produce something very strange. Combining the writings may need more

time than writing the drafts all by oneself ... We will first hold a meeting to discuss ... make sure we agree on the direction, or highlighting points ... that is the key points of the content ... and then one person will write the drafts.

Another PR executive from a large international firm reiterates this in the following manner.

It's hard to tell who generated the original idea because we had had too many brainstorming meetings. Sometimes it might be that someone else has suggested an idea, which is not adapted but it inspired me to come up with another idea. In that case I still give the credit to the one who inspired me... but everyone is involved in it.

It is interesting to note that in the academy, collaboration takes a very different form. There is always an expectation of equal participation by all members of the group because of the nature of assessment associated with such tasks. Although the task is labelled as a group project, the assessment is often individual, which strangely enough results in fragmented texts, which is not the case in real life professional contexts.

### **Creativity in PR discourse**

Another important aspect of interdiscursive collaboration in PR discourse is its creativity, which again is rather different from creativity in other kinds of writing, for instance, in literary works. In PR discourse, it is not simply a property of the text or the end product; more importantly, it is a function of the collaborative social processes, the discursive tools employed, the kind of social relationships that facilitate them, and the ways novices are socialized into these creative discursive actions (Jones et al., 2012). The process of collaborative and creative construction of PR documents, including company and client meetings, promotional texts, press releases, podcasts, and proposals, involves a large number of interrelated texts. Creativity lies in the way these texts are integrated and reframed to achieve a particular kind of communicative objective often through brainstorming in smaller groups, researching various aspects of audience uptake, in an attempt to construct press releases, writing speeches, arranging appearances on talk shows, developing case studies, and assembling press kits (Aronson, Spetner & Ames, 2007). Creative collaboration in PR writing is thus a matter of how multiple texts are jointly coordinated to accomplish a particular set of goals within individual campaigns (Aronson, Spetner & Ames, 2007).

Individual texts thus are not necessarily seen as creative in themselves, as is most often seen in academic contexts, but are viewed as creative if and when they contribute to the objectives of the PR activity. In other words, texts are seen as parts of “coordinated (and) purposeful actions” (Reddi, 2009: 400) designed to solve particular problems and meet particular overall objectives. Creativity is located not so much in the discursive products as in the coordinated actions through which different kinds of discursive products are crafted and deployed in different ways during the course of a campaign.

### **Use of templates**

One of the interesting issues that surprised us most in the discursive actions of PR specialists was its use of what they referred to as templates, or what Jones et al. (2012: 154) call “discourses in place”. In all of the firms we studied, the creation of texts, whether they were proposals, press releases, speeches or brochures, was often based on previously used templates. As one account executive in a medium-sized firm put it:

If some text can be reused, then we reuse it. We may just change some of the information like the name or background of the clients, because what the clients want is sometimes very similar. For proposals, we may only have to change the services information and the budget. If it’s a press release, we sometimes just need to update the facts and figures.

It was interesting to note that PR companies normally work with two rather different kinds of support they seem to get from earlier discourses, which the PR professionals call “templates” and “boilerplates”. “Templates”, for them refer to the rhetorical frameworks already used by the company for a specific construction of genre, which can be reused in subsequent exercises of the same kind or genre with modifications, additions of new content, whereas “boilerplates” refer to items of content, which can be reused, or often provided by the clients, which can be inserted in the framework with necessary adjustments. It may be pointed out that nearly all the standard genres that a PR writer is generally engaged in have a template which gives them the rhetorical framework that he or she has to work within, and which underpins the usefulness and efficacy of the genre framework (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993 & 2004) that has been so very popular in most forms of ESP work. In most instances of the discursive construction in PR contexts that we had the occasion to study, we found that appropriateness of the available



template was almost taken for granted; it was only a matter of pulling out the right one from the repository of such rhetorical forms that every PR company seemed to have. When asked about the frequent use of templates, a senior executive of a PR firm said:

Templates are like ... the logo of a company or brand. When people receive that template, they know instantly that it is from Mercedes Benz. There is some information that we always put at the beginning or particular part(s) of the writings, people who get used to receiving our press releases will know instantly that the writing is from Mercedes Benz. It can also save their time because they know exactly where to find what information.

The main reason for the use of templates is to save time but, perhaps more importantly, to stay consistent. It is interesting to note that in the corporate world there seem to be templates for every type of writing and they rarely hesitate to reuse them wherever possible, often updating facts and figures, if and when required. He continues, citing press releases as an example.

Normally you do not have to draft the press release because the client has already sent you the information. What you need to do is just to modify the information a bit and present it in a press release format.

In this case, the “press release format” normally used by this firm acted as the template within which the boilerplate provided by the client was inserted. Templates, on the other hand, almost always come from the firm and constitute an important part of the firm’s discursive culture, heritage and branding. The purpose of templates is not just to assist the firm in producing texts more efficiently, but also to assist readers, especially media professionals, in using these texts more effectively as genre. As one senior account executive put it:

Our templates are like our company brand. When people get stuff from us, they know instantly what to do with it. There’s some information, for instance, that we always put at the beginning or in particular parts of the text. People who get used to receiving our press releases will know instantly where to find what information.

Some companies make templates and boilerplates, in the form of previously authored press releases, proposals and other texts, available to employees online through secure servers or on shared hard drives. A senior manager of a large multinational firm described his company’s practices like this:

So for example if you're trying to put together a new business proposal, basically you just log on and you can download every case study that (name of firm) has ever done on that kind of product or service and just dump the information into your own presentation without having to ask somebody or put out a mass email, and that's being constantly updated with every single thing that comes out of this firm, and we have dedicated people who're actually managing these resources to make sure they're being built up and that the right resources are easy to find.

Nearly all the practitioners we talked to, however, cautioned us against assuming that the appropriation of previously written texts or previously designed templates was either easy or uncreative. It involves, they told us, complex practices of decision making which include not just selecting the best texts to appropriate but also adapting them in creative ways to fit new products or new goals. The same senior manager quoted above, for example, said:

When you're writing something, you should never have to start from scratch, so you have to start by thinking, right, what have we done before that's applicable here? If the objective is to launch a new car in China you might actually find that the proposal that we did to launch a new plane in China is the most appropriate template, or if it is to launch a regional line of mobile phones, we actually launched a regional line of enterprise software which might actually be a good fit, right? So all that stuff's up there, and readily available to everybody, so the key issue is deciding which document is most like the one you are about to write.

A manager from another firm emphasized that creativity requires reusing previously written materials in a "good way". "To a certain extent, this can be a challenge to your writing skills", she said. "You can't simply copy-and-paste. You have to think about the effective pitching angle".

One major theme that ran through our discussions and observations, was that creative texts were not much use without a good creative idea at the foundation of a given campaign, and good ideas that addressed particular goals for particular clients at particular points in time were much more difficult to reuse. One manager said, "Sometimes people would go and cut and paste something and they would get it wrong, because they're not only cutting and pasting the structure and the content but also the creative idea, which you know, may not be appropriate for every context". Another described creative processes as existing in a kind of hierarchy:

It's sort of the hierarchy of creativity right? So, at the top is the campaign theme and it has to be something clever, twisted or it makes the target audience think about something differently and behave differently, and then below that are the creative tactics, and then below that there's the creative content which often involves doing things that are actually fairly ordinary, so what determines whether something is creative at the bottom of the food chain depends on that central strategic or interesting thing that's decided at the top.

In fact, we often observed, especially in small and medium-sized firms, these hierarchal dyads developing into mentoring relationships in which the focus of the superior's feedback was as much on developing the junior staff member's writing ability as on improving the draft. An entry in our research assistant's reflective diary describes one such relationship like this:

In this meeting, (supervisor's name) and I sat down together to talk about the changes he made on the draft, and he explained the reasons why he had made these changes. He gave many useful suggestions and comments ... In terms of language use, he focused a lot on the words, pointing out which words I had been overusing and suggesting some more specific words ... As for content, he added several constructive suggestions in the '*Notes to Editors*' of the press release. He also gave positive feedback and encouraging comments, "I was so happy and impressed by this. If I had to grade this, I would give it an A+!"

Of course, such relationships do not always grow out of the hierarchical face systems associated with the drafting process. The managing director of a medium-sized firm, for example, related her past experiences working in much less successful hierarchal dyads:

I've worked for PR bosses who ask you to write a press release and seem to take great delight in telling you that it sucks without indicating how it can be improved and then you go through endless rounds of time wasting trying to get it right until the deadline looms and the boss does it himself scrapping all of your work. But even worse, the release then goes to the client who sends it back full of edits and nasty comments about it being useless and then your boss blames you again and you're back at the start of a time wasting cycle. So it's not like because you are more senior so you don't have to draft ... No, this is not my style. Because I have worked in agencies before, I don't like this kind of hierarchy. I think it should be teamwork. We all work together to serve the clients. We are more result-oriented. With less hierarchy, our co-operation is better.

## Discursive process

We now look at the actual writing process through the drafts of an intended press release from one of the medium-sized PR firms. Although they seem to have a good idea of the rhetorical form – that is, the template, the content or what is referred to as boilerplate, needs to be worked out. In most cases, it starts off with a brainstorming session involving all the members of the team, including the senior and the very junior ones. We shall consider three of the ten drafts actually constructed at various stages, to illustrate what goes on as part of the discursive process. The first illustration (see Appendix 1) comes from the second brainstorming meeting based on the notes from one of the members. Although we do not find anything of substance here, it demonstrates how some of these tasks begin from scratch. A few drafts later, the document starts giving shape to some parts of the boilerplates, which is given in Appendix 2.

Even here, the information is somewhat sketchy and we do not find any clear indication of the expected rhetorical form at this stage. However, this draft is significant in that the senior team member starts giving detailed feedback on the draft submitted by the team. As we can see the feedback is typically in the form of handwritten notes on the printed draft, and not through track changes on the marked up electronic versions. The main purpose of such feedback from the senior member is to make learning a priority, rather than just the revision of the draft. The senior member (Chief Executive) of the PR firm confirms this when he points out:

Well, ... I ... believe ... in using any ... revision process as a ... sort of educational process as well. ... I've worked in other consultancies where the editing process is done by an email or file transfer from one person to another. And ... you can do it by a track change ... in a pressured environment of ... a PR firm where time is often quite tight ... If I were just to edit it on a screen, email it back, generally ... your subordinate will just go accept changes.

After several subsequent drafts, the expected final shape emerges using the standard template, which is indicated in the version in Appendix 3.

## Revision as educational process

Feedback by the teacher in academic contexts is often seen as part of the assessment process, and is rarely seen or used as educational process, which

could be attributed to the time pressure and other classroom constraints on the teacher and the attitude of students who often view teachers as assessors in such tasks. In PR contexts, on the other hand, in spite of the constraints of time and the unlimited number of drafts involved, feedback is often seen as a learning opportunity for junior participants who value such opportunities for learning the genre in question, especially the use of lexicogrammar favoured in expert communication. Let us look at an example of the use of lexicogrammar in the specialised PR genre (changes highlighted in italics):

Revision: Example

China Resources Property Limited: Strategy Plan for Harbour Road Garden

DRAFT

CRPL will work closely with LCSD and assure the quality of maintenance and management is above standard after the revitalisation project is completed. The new garden will be a better design and equipped leisure space to serve the needs of Wan Chai residents and workers.

REVISION

CRPL will work closely with LCSD and assure the *highest* quality of maintenance and management is above standard after the revitalisation project is completed. The new garden will be a better, *more modern open* design and equipped *with pleasant* leisure space to serve the needs of Wanchai residents and *CRPL building tenants and adjacent office* workers.

The concern and value of such revision work is highlighted in the statement from the Chief Executive of a medium-sized PR firm quoted earlier.

## Concluding remarks

Considering the PR industry as a key site of engagement to study what Lave and Wenger (1991: 89) call “legitimate peripheral participation” in a “community of practice”, this paper has made an attempt to underpin “interdiscursivity” in collaborative discursive actions of a number of PR firms from Hong Kong. The discursive process often takes place in a relaxed and collegial environment where employees at various levels put their efforts together as a team to brainstorm the basics and to discuss content as input to the chosen template for the textual genre in question. The study clearly

demonstrates the interdiscursive character of PR discourse, whether it is an advertisement, a press release, a podcast or a proposal. Every genre in question goes through a rather critical and creative cycle of discursive acts, often based on rhetorical forms (templates) used by the firm on earlier occasions and reused in order to save time and effort and also as the logo or brand identity of the firm. The creativity in PR discourse comes not necessarily from new content but from the complex practices of decision making which include not just selecting the best texts to appropriate but also adapting them in creative ways to fit new products or new goals.

The study also demonstrates the nature of collaboration in PR contexts, which seems to be very different from what happens in a similar activity within the academy. In the academic context, we often believe in equal contribution from all the participants, sometimes on all aspects of collaboration, which leads to fragmented texts, as they are written by several people and then put together; whereas in the workplace, though everyone is involved in brainstorming the content of the genre, often only one person is given the task of drafting the text, and others come back to it to offer their critical and constructive comments during its multiple drafts before it is finalized after careful editing. It is often difficult for participants to offer critical and constructive comments to other participants in academic contexts.

Collaborative exercise in the workplace is also different from that in the academy in another respect. Whereas group work as part of a curriculum is most often seen as an assessment task, and hence very little learning takes place through such collaborative actions, collaboration in the PR industry is essentially seen as learning, where feedback on drafts is often critical and constructive in handwritten form, because the idea is to improve on the draft and often one has to go through several rounds of drafts. Collaboration in the PR context we have seen was both involvement and disengagement, in the sense that though everyone is supposed to participate in the discursive act, that is, in the writing of complete drafts, they are involved in the process of selecting content, and then again in the form of detached constructive as well as critical feedback.

Besides, this study highlights one of the most important and crucial challenges facing present-day pedagogy, that is, the issue of plagiarism in professional and academic assessment. As we noticed, the workplace relies heavily on the use and reuse of established templates; however, in academic contexts, any borrowing or appropriation of content and its use in academic

assessment is considered negative and hence dispreferred. Neither of these views is incorrect. The truth of the matter seems to be that interdiscursive appropriation, which includes reframing, reformulating, and recontextualizing, is a desirable skill and should form a necessary part of most academic writing curricula or professional training programmes. Any form of legitimate appropriation, as discussed in the earlier sections of this paper, should become an important and desirable skill as part of academic training and should focus on giving credit to other voices wherever necessary.

Finally, the study also contributes to our understanding of interdiscursivity in genre theory, especially in the context of professional discourse, which unfortunately is one of the less explored areas of genre theory.

[Paper received 05 July 2012]

[Revised paper accepted 16 December 2012]

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The paper draws extensively on the work done under an RGC, HKSAR funded GRE project (No. 9041281), led by Dr. Rodney H. Jones, and entitled *Collaborative writing in the Creative Communication Industries: Professional and Pedagogical Perspectives*.

<sup>2</sup> The academic context is the BA degree in “English for Professional Communication at the City University of Hong Kong and many of the students after completing their degree are employed in the PR industry in Hong Kong. On this programme, the students are required to do a two-semester attachment to outside companies working on their projects, which often involve professional communication work, many of them in the PR industry.

<sup>3</sup> All the perceptions of PR executives variously quoted in this study have been anonymised to protect the identities of various firms and their employees.

# Appendix 1: Notes from the second brainstorming meeting.

*iCubed.us: a global brand*

*empowering*

*sustainable global*

**8 key messages of iCubed.us:**

- \* Shortlisted by Margaret
- 1. Committed to maximising the potential of our youth.
- 2. Encouraging excellence towards a better future world.
- 3. iCubed: Internet with attitude and social conscience.
- 4. iCubed: transforming today's teens to tomorrow's leaders.
- 5. Expanding global horizons, developing community respect.
- 6. iCubed: Critical thinking towards global harmony.
- 7. Teaching today's teens to aim high and see wide.
- 8. Encouraging integrity and intelligence.

*iCubed.us: a virtual community facilitating youth involvement and informed choices and some options*

*iCubed.us: online lesson history for taking notes*

*social network a world opportunity*

*Empowering and encouraging*

*social*

*integrity and intelligence*

*teens*

*tomorrow's leaders*


*iCubed.us: a timely, clear, informed and opinionated opinion online programme for teens*

*iCubed.us: Empowering and encouraging young people to make their own choices*

*Value*



## Appendix 3: Final text using the standard template.



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

***iCUBED.us*: Inspiring and empowering today's youngsters to grow and develop their full potential**

*iCUBED.us* is pronounced as *iCUBED-dot-'us'* (you and me) instead of *iCUBED-dot-'US(A)'*. *iCUBED.us* endeavours to nurture a group of open-minded and socially-responsible teenagers in society. The website [www.iCUBED.us](http://www.iCUBED.us) provides an online English language platform for young people between the age of 13 to 21 to discuss and understand various issues with peers from around the world. The *iCUBED.us*' stretch teens site encompasses three components, including an online magazine, a lively blogs section and an interactive forum section. Registered members from every part of the world can interact with each other or post their thinking and perspectives on current events or ideas, whenever or wherever they are. *iCUBED.us* creates a trustworthy community for interested and interesting teens, a place where they can hang out, have fun and can share views on local and international issues that they care about.

With a goal to maximise the potential of 13-21 year olds, *iCUBED.us* regularly initiates youth projects either stand-alone or with the help of organisations or schools' participation. *iCUBED.us* also organises various online contests or competitions. By joining these events, registered users can practice and improve their English writing skills. Awards are given, online, to the winning contestants, in addition to the thrill and pride of seeing their work published on *iCUBED.us*.

Apart from online writing contests and fun competitions, *iCUBED.us* also engages in setting up different community events for the young. An annual *Silent Film Festival Contest* will be launched on **1st August, 2008**, with an intention of educating teenagers around the world that "pictures speak louder than words" through film making. "This festival is about finding new raw talent and giving youthful creativity a productive outlet. It encourages our youngsters to develop their non-academic talents," emphasised Margaret Chen, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of [www.iCUBED.us](http://www.iCUBED.us). The event will be open to youth, both locally and globally.

Registration will begin on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 2008, and will include an informative packet – where contestants will be introduced to the best of visual storytelling skills with suggestions of Silent Film Greats, before they set out to begin their filming. The competition will close on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2008, and the official award ceremony will be held in a world-class state-of-the-art The Grand on 1st November, 2008 in the afternoon. The Gala Premiere will feature the three winners' entries and will be presented awards and a keynote address from a special guest. Channel [V] will cover this exclusive event and broadcast the winning on television. "Channel[V] is interested to offer incentives for youth to explore their hidden talents, and we see this as an opportunity for us to discover untapped talent to join our growing industry," said Eddy Tan, Vice President of Programming. (Please see *Note to Editors* below for more details).

In addition, *iCUBED.us* is working on a conference for young journalists, with aims to realise in the second half of 2008. Further conference details will be announced on *iCUBED.us*. "With an increasing number of youths spending much of their free time on the internet, it is essential to

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**[www.iCUBED.us](http://www.iCUBED.us)**  
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