

When arts meets enterprise: Transdisciplinarity, student identities, and EAP

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This paper reports on a qualitative study investigating the experience and perspectives of students using English as an international language studying transdisciplinary master's degrees related to culture industries at Goldsmiths, University of London. The particular focus of this paper concerns their experiences of writing several different genres on their degree programmes, including a category of written assessment that, in keeping with the transdisciplinary project of opening up disciplinary borders, transgresses typical genre parameters. We argue that (increasingly popular) transdisciplinary programmes of this kind challenge preconceived expectations about academic writing and require a high tolerance of ambiguity on the part of both students and EAP lecturers: established genre conventions may be destabilized and writing become a precarious yet inherently creative process. Our findings highlight the significance of students' identities with regard to negotiating these written assessments; they support the view that academic literacies' emphasis on student perspectives enriches text-oriented EAP pedagogy, and that insights gleaned from small-scale ethnographic studies of this kind enhance the embedding of subject-specific EAP academic writing development.

Keywords: transdisciplinarity; academic literacies; genre; identities; culture industries

Introduction

Recent years have seen the rise of a new category of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary master's programme in UK universities with titles such as 'Arts Management' or 'The Cultural Industries'. They exemplify the disruption of the academic/vocational divide within higher education (HE) institutions, challenging specifically the traditional boundaries between the domains of arts and enterprise. This development is significant for us as English for academic purposes (EAP) lecturers at Goldsmiths, University of London, for two interrelated reasons. These degree programmes recruit large numbers of students using English as an international language from diverse cultural, academic, and professional backgrounds. Moreover, they create specific challenges for students and EAP lecturers in terms of the heterogeneous and possibly innovative written assessments required. Hence, this paper focuses on the experiences and perspectives of students studying on two such MA programmes run by Goldsmiths' Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship, namely MA Arts Administration and Cultural Policy and MA Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship (MA CCE).

The students whose experience and perspectives we investigated were attending our weekly non-credit-bearing EAP in-session classes intended to help L2 international students understand the 'institutional practice[s] of mystery' (Lillis, 1999) of academia and undertake their assignments successfully. For their degree programmes, they were required to write a range of genres that still tend to be embedded in different ontological and epistemological disciplinary

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boundaries, and that imply differing subject positions. Further, MA CCE requires students to do a context-specific 'hybrid' 'academic' business plan that does not neatly fit with any prior model. All this has implications for EAP lecturers, who may not only have to become acquainted with a broader range of writing genres than they usually teach, but also need to help students approach a more ambiguous written task for which there is no corpus of exemplars. In order to better understand this complex situation, it seemed important to obtain an insider, emic view of these issues, and to this end we carried out an exploratory qualitative study with a group of students studying on these two degree programmes. A key question for us concerned how they understood and negotiated the different genres they were required to write, and how they experienced the multiple, shifting subject positions these implied. We also interviewed the MA CCE programme leader in order to gain a deeper understanding of the rationale and expectations for that degree, and discussed key findings from our discussion with the students. Given its interface of identities and genres, this project situates itself loosely within the current discussion concerning the relationship between academic literacies and genre-based approaches to writing within EAP, connecting it with issues raised by the wider move towards transdisciplinarity. Starting with a brief discussion of transdisciplinarity, followed by a short overview of the current debate on the relationship between academic literacies and text-based EAP pedagogies, the paper then outlines our research and findings. We argue that transdisciplinary degrees present new challenges for international students in relation to the range of contrasting written assignments required, and their propensity to innovate forms of assessment that destabilize typical genre parameters students may have previously learned. Furthermore, these challenges are closely bound up with issues of identity, a situation on which academic literacies' 'ethnographic lens' (Street, 2009) can shed light, thereby helping EAP lecturers improve the support they provide students.

Transdisciplinarity

Transdisciplinarity is proposed as a new approach to knowledge making, within and outside academia. It aims to respond to today's globalized and networked world in ways that exceed the capacities of traditional discipline formations, in quest of:

a way of thinking and a way of organising knowledge and informing action that can assist us in tackling the complexity of the world, while at the same time inviting us to come to grips with the role of the inquirer in the process of the inquiry.

(Montuori, 2008: ix)

The first use of the term is attributed to Piaget in 1970 in the context of an OECD meeting, where it is described as 'a superior stage' to interdisciplinarity, 'which will not be limited to recognize the interactions and/or reciprocities between the specialized researches, but which will locate these links inside a total system without stable boundaries between the disciplines' (Piaget, in Nicolescu, 2008: 11). In practice, we have found that the terms tend to be used rather fluidly, and we are not overly concerned with precise definitions. What is relevant to us is the creative yet precarious consequences of opening up and transforming traditional disciplinary parameters in a specific HE context, and the impact this has on student writing: how it diversifies what students are required to write, how their expectations of academic writing are challenged, and how both these factors affect their identities as student writers.

Following Piaget, the approach to transdisciplinarity associated with the quantum physicist Basarab Nicolescu advocates recognition of the underlying unity of knowledge beyond the 'paradigm of disjunction and reduction' (Morin, 2008: 28) between science and the humanities that has prevailed for centuries in Western culture. As summarized by Nicolescu, transdisciplinarity 'concerns that which is at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and

beyond all disciplines' (Nicolescu, 2008: 2). This runs counter to the Cartesian logic underpinning binary oppositions such as theory and practice, subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity. Transgressing the ontological and epistemological boundaries between fields of knowledge that might normally be considered separate, it thus opens up a space for a creative form of inquiry involving ambiguity, uncertainty, experimentation, and transformation (Montuori, 2008; Montuori, 2010; Nicolescu, 2002; Nicolescu, 2008).

A transformative process of this order can be seen in degrees related to the cultural industries such as the programmes on which we focus, which unsettle the 'paradigm of disjunction and reduction' between abstract cultural theory and the world of business, between traditional notions of the 'academic' and the professional/vocational. The MA CCE programme challenges stereotypical notions of artistic creativity as incommensurable with enterprise. The programme leader explained that it aims to treat these not as incompatible oil and water, but rather as 'oil and vinegar', which she described as 'two really pungent things that when they come together correctly are really delicious and beautiful, you can do great stuff with it.' In this way, it brings together two 'fields' in the Bourdieusian sense (Bourdieu, 1986), one underpinned by aesthetic concerns privileging cultural capital, the other primarily valuing economic capital.

The transformation of knowledge has an inevitable transformational impact on academic writing. As King (2011: 4) writes, 'Transdisciplinary work befriends and experiences a range of academic and other genres of writing, entailment, and analysis, together with their consequent and diverging values.' This points to the limitations of formulaic textual approaches to genre analysis in EAP practice, and the value of engaging with a social practice oriented approach advocated by academic literacies.

EAP, academic literacies, and genre-based approaches to writing

The tension between academic literacies and genre-based approaches to writing centres on a dichotomy between social practice and text. Text-oriented genre analysis has become an integral part of EAP research and practice, notably the approach informed by John Swales's (1990) seminal work on genre, which focuses on identifying rhetorical 'moves' within subcomponents of a genre, and the Sydney School, which uses the analytical tools of systemic function linguistics (SFL) to analyse disciplinary texts and is concerned with identifying and explicitly teaching the linguistic and discursive features of different genres in relation to their social functions (Wingate, 2012: 27–8). As with academic literacies, there is a clear sense of a desire to empower students; Hyland (2003: 22) speaks of 'provid[ing] disadvantaged learners with access to the cultural capital of socially valued genres'.

However, academic literacies' emphasis on practice reflects, as Lillis and Scott (2007: 11–12) summarize, 'that specific instances of language use – *spoken and written texts* – do not exist in isolation but are bound up with what people do – *practices* in the material, social world'. It brings an explicitly 'anthropological stance to the study of student academic writing' (Lillis and Scott, 2007: 12), for which ethnography provides the main methodological framework. They critique a tendency within EAP to dilute academic literacies' ideological dimension of 'academic socialisation' to one of accommodation and acculturation. They describe this as a 'normative' view, characterized by an 'identify and induct' (Lillis and Scott, 2007: 14) approach widespread in EAP, in contrast to academic literacies' 'transformative' ambitions. In turn, academic literacies has been found wanting in terms of its lack of a pedagogy (Wingate and Tribble, 2012).

This dichotomy, however, should not be over-emphasized; there is recognition from all sides that there are overlaps between EAP, genre theory, and academic literacies, and these are all heterogeneous fields. EAP encompasses a range of traditions including tendencies such as critical

EAP, which share academic literacies' concerns with challenging power relations and inequalities (Wingate and Tribble, 2012; Wingate, 2012; Tribble and Wingate, 2013). Lillis (2008: 359) speaks of a *text-writer* continuum within research on academic writing. The same description is used by Coffin and Donohoe (2012: 7) discussing the relationship between SFL and academic literacies, with academic literacies positioned 'toward the writer end' and SFL 'at the text end'. Coffin and Donohoe further point out that neither academic literacies nor SFL research are homogeneous fields, and variations exist in both tendencies in terms of researchers' degree of engagement with both social practice and text analysis.

From our perspective, the focus on micro-contexts offered by academic literacies' anthropological stance offers a valuable complement to text-focused EAP. The in-session classes we teach are subject-specific, already requiring on the part of the EAP lecturer a deeper understanding of the content and rationale of the degree programmes than would be the case with a more generic approach. Typically, our preparation for a subject-specific in-session programme entails familiarizing ourselves with the degree structure; acquiring at least some basic knowledge of relevant concepts and theories; establishing a channel of communication with the subject lecturer(s) in order to obtain key reading texts, assignment titles, and other materials that can be exploited for teaching purposes; gaining clarification of the subject lecturer(s) expectations; and clarifying our own role. This forms an essential part of embedding our practice within the disciplines. Student-centred ethnographic research adds a greater depth to this, offering a better grasp of the challenges as the students themselves perceive them. Moreover, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary tendencies point up the limitations of a 'conceptualisation of genre in terms of established disciplinary norms for communication, given primarily by the texts written by academics within a disciplinary community' (Street, 2009), since these norms become increasingly under strain. As new or hybrid genres emerge, 'genre knowledge' becomes more problematic if this knowledge is itself ambiguous. In a degree like MA CCE, which is looking for new models, a formulaic 'how to write a business plan', 'identify and induct' approach is of limited use.

The project

Goldsmiths' Institute for Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship was established in 2008, with the name itself suggesting the transdisciplinarity discussed above: *creative* referring to the arts, while *cultural* has sociological connotations, and *entrepreneurship* references the business studies tradition. Regarding the two programmes we focus on, MA Arts Administration is for students wishing to work either as an arts centre manager or in arts policy and MA Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship is for those who would like to create their own start-up business within the cultural industries.

The main assessment tasks are essays (which generally involve engagement with complex concepts and theories), a dissertation, a business plan, and an internship report. The student writer's subject positions implied by these genres may be (somewhat schematically) characterized thus: the discursive essay and dissertation position the student writer as the author of an argument engaged in a broader dialogue around its topic; the business plan positions them as an entrepreneur or a manager seeking to persuade an investor; the internship report, according to the MA CCE programme leader, positions them as an anthropologist 'so that they are in the organization, and that they are looking at and recognizing the patterns from within it' (programme leader comment). Thus students must shift subject position from one assignment to the next, and in their individual enactments, these positions intersect with a range of other facets of the writer's identity.

As we wanted to know how the students themselves understood and negotiated writing on these degree programmes, we asked for volunteers from both programmes who had been attending our in-session classes. An initial questionnaire was completed in the autumn term, before students had begun work in earnest on any of their assignments. In the spring term, after they had all written at least one piece of work, three focus group discussions were held. A semi-structured discussion format was used in these, so that all students were asked the same key questions, although we could go off in promising new directions if they arose. Finally, we also interviewed the programme leader and creator of the MA in Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurship in order to see how she perceived the programme and how this compared with the perceptions of her students.

The students in our focus groups included a range of nationalities – Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, Greek, German, Indonesian, and Syrian – and had diverse academic and professional backgrounds as well as a wide range of prior experience of the various writing genres required for their master's programmes, both in English and in their first language. With regard to essay writing in English, the experience of several students was limited to the 250-word IELTS essay, whereas others had completed a 10,000-word dissertation. Although few had previously written a business plan, several felt confident about it based on their understandings of what producing a business plan required. Generally, students expressed more anxiety about the essay task because of the word length, the quantity of research required, and the differences compared with what was expected for essay writing in their LI. None had previously written an internship report, some indicating that they had 'no idea' what it entailed, while others speculated that it involved criticality, reflectivity, and self-evaluation.

When the focus groups were conducted in the spring term, the students had all completed a 5,000–6,000-word essay, and some had also written other genres, and had by this point started to get input related to their business plans – thus, these were the assessments that dominated their discussion. The first question focused on their individual reasons for choosing this type of programme. The second was interested in whether they saw any overlaps and continuities between the different written assessments. The third was interested in students' perception of their roles and identities in different writing situations. The fourth asked about their reaction to the different writing tasks. The fifth was inspired by Raymond Williams's *Keywords* (1976), where he considered the complexity and range of meanings of familiar, but potentially confusing, words, such as *culture*, *popular*, and *wealth*. We asked for students' perceptions of words that had a similar potential to cover a range of meanings and that they were likely to encounter in different contexts during their studies. Our key words were *academic*, *analyse*, *theory*, *research*, and *philosophy*. The last question asked how students' understanding of writing at university had changed since starting their MA programmes at Goldsmiths and what had contributed to that change.

Findings

Three key points pertaining to student identities and written genres emerged from our data.

1: Identities help shape perceptions of the degree programmes and writing genres

MA CCE students' understandings of the basic rationale of the structure of their master's programme and the relations among the different genres they were required to write were shaped by their identities as (aspiring) cultural industries workers to a noticeable extent. The

rationale of the curriculum design was seen in terms of an instrumental, pragmatic view of cultural theory: the 'Theories of the Culture Industry' module was scheduled in the autumn term so that the themes and concepts studied could be applied to the more practical tasks the following terms:

There's a reason why you have the theory before the practical, in order to use it.
(Student comment)

When [we] write about business plan or internship, maybe we can explain how theory works in the actual situation. Maybe we can connect that kind of thing.
(Student comment)

The pragmatic take on the theoretical content of the programme extended beyond the completion of the writing tasks:

When I read academic books ... it inspires my practical ideas for my career.
(Student comment)

Furthermore, it was suggested that the flexibility required in the writing of the various assignments mirrors the real-life experience of the creative entrepreneur, whose career is likely to be uncertain, unpredictable, and varied:

... like entrepreneur has no certain job or career, he can shift between different careers, so that's really important for entrepreneur to learn how to write in different writing styles ... it's really important we can adapt the different writing styles – we might need all of them or some of them, it depends ...
(Student comment)

This led us to consider whether the degree programme as a whole reflects the precariousness of the field of creative entrepreneurship. Precariousness is a key concept explored in the 'Theories of the culture industries' module. In contemporary neo-liberal societies, 'the precariat' refers to 'increasing numbers of workers in affluent societies [that] are engaged in insecure, casualised or irregular labour', including various forms of cultural labour (Gill and Pratt, 2008: 1). McRobbie (2002: 97) describes cultural work as 'Requiring risk-taking activity and high degrees of mobility from its workforce, [which] also relies on disembedded and highly individualized personnel'. Creative workers will often have portfolio careers with multiple revenue streams and high levels of insecurity, requiring flexibility and tolerance of unpredictable and precarious circumstances. (When we presented some of our findings on this research project at the 2014 Norwegian Forum on English for Academic Purposes (NFEAP) conference, a connection between the concept of precariousness and EAP's 'Cinderella' institutional status was made in the Q&A and subsequent informal conversations with other delegates.) In our interview with her, the MA CCE programme leader confirmed that the degree programme did indeed have a performative aspect, the ambition being to model the life of the creative entrepreneur who has to cope with constant change and the inherent precariousness of work in the creative industries. Moreover, she described the year as a 'laboratory' during which the students could explore their interests and potentials, which would include coming to recognize their weaknesses. Hence, 'success' may, in part at least, be measured in terms of increased self-awareness, rather than by more traditional measures, such as good grades. For our student informants, the uncertainty entailed in this 'laboratory' could be disorienting, but they also recognized it as having positive potential for self-transformation:

... we had 'Culture Industry' in the last term, it's very theoretical and academic; it's like we should do more related to theory. But this term, we have business plan and entrepreneurship modelling,

where we need to do market research or something practical, pragmatic. So it's very different, it like, turns us from academic girls into business people, yeah!

(Student comment)

With regard to the variety of genres students were required to write, very little was said in the focus groups about the differences in their lexicogrammatical or discoursal features. The fact that they all had to be written in English was suggested as a more crucial issue than figuring out the differing purposes, rhetorical features, or interpersonal relations of each genre and the impact of these on language choice. As one student put it, 'it's just different in format, I still have to tackle all the English difficulties I have'. The contrast between the modifiers *just* and *still* and '*all the English difficulties*' emphasizes this perceived straightforwardness in distinguishing among genre characteristics. Students mentioned the longer time they required to read, and the barriers they faced to participating in class discussions alongside LI English students. Some were conscious of a need to engage with an unfamiliar mode of Western criticality. Moreover, one student speculated that when assessing students' work, tutors must, albeit subconsciously, compare the writing of students using English as an international language with that of LI English students. (We would emphasize that no evidence was offered to suggest this was the case; the fact that students *perceive* themselves as treated differently is nonetheless meaningful.)

What emerged as a more significant point than understanding textual differences among genres was the students' perception of the degree of ownership and autonomy available for them in the assessments. In contrast with the business plan, which was perceived as focused more on the students' own aims and ambitions, the 'Theories of the Culture Industry' essay was perceived as constraining the students' own ideas, as the following quotations vividly illustrate:

For the cultural industry essay ... first I *had to* adapt myself – I did the Scott Lash [a cultural theorist] one, so I *had to adapt to Scott Lash's mind* by reading his books, understanding what he means by blah blah blah, then choose a case study, then find other theorists to see who has quotes I need to put my point. *I don't know if I think on my own or Scott Lash ... I'm really confused ... but with the business plan I think it's for myself. I just know exactly what I want to do* and I just find proof to prove myself ... *sure I have my own opinions in the conclusion [of the essay]*, but it's only a small part ...

(Student comment)

I had to look for all the books I want and also I cannot add too many personal things which is a torture ...

(Student comment)

The contrast was not only between essay and business plan. One student compared the 'Theories of the Culture Industry' essay with a drama pathway portfolio task that did not require the same volume of reading or use of academic evidence, and was perceived as taking the student's views, rather than the ideas of others, as the point of departure:

The Theories of the Culture Industry essay was really research based so I had loads of books to read, I *had to quote and summarise then write my own thing ...* whereas with Drama portfolio *it was only me starting from scratch. I'm analysing a performance in 2,000 words ... with nothing to depend on ...*

(Student comment)

In these comments, the high-frequency occurrence of the deontic modality with regard to the constraints (what I *have to do*) imposed by the essay is striking. In contrast, the business plan is aligned with agency (what I *can choose to do*) – the ability for each student to focus on their particular interests as creative entrepreneurs.

2: 'Being critical' across genres

In the course of the discussion, students' comparisons of their assignments became more nuanced as they identified points of overlap, with criticality in particular seen as relevant to each written genre. Each assessment, in differing ways, required them to be evaluative. One student made the following observation about the student writer's shifting subject positions effected by the differing critical dynamic in the essay and the business plan:

[for the 'Theories of the Culture Industry' essay] we have to be critical, but [in the business plan] I'm the criticised one! ... In the theory I criticised the industry, but now I'm the person in the industry.

(Student comment)

Similarly to the instrumental approach to theory mentioned above, the kind of criticality required for the essay was also seen as a transferrable skill relevant not only to other writing assessments, but to the wider context of the students' working lives:

Before coming here I had no idea how to write a piece with evidence ... I used to write email etc. to business clients in personal style, no evidence as with the Theories of the Culture Industry essay ... Maybe it could improve the way I construct my message with clients.

(Student comment)

If [a researched essay] makes me understand another person in the world, then the world operates like this.

(Student comment)

However, although there was a strong awareness of the importance of 'being critical', there was no discussion of what that term actually means.

3: What is an 'academic' business plan?

This is a question one of our student informants asked about this assignment required for MA CCE, reflecting an uncertainty that a number of them shared. In transdisciplinary fashion, it is neither a traditional business plan nor an academic essay, but draws from and creates something unfamiliar from both genres. Moreover, as it was based on each student's existing or prospective creative enterprise, it was highly individualized and could be approached in a variety of ways. Although they were given guidelines by the department, students were encouraged to be critical of existing models of business plan writing, and to find their own way to approach the task in keeping with the programme's ambition of creating new models in the arts. On similar grounds, the programme leader declined to make available an example of a high-scoring business plan. This lack of a prototype prompted some confusion among students:

... we cannot explain it very clear, we *are just feeling what we're going to do* ...

(Student comment)

The programme leader saw this response as another dimension of the programme's performative remit, since it could be compared to the kind of real-life situation where a creative entrepreneur has to figure out what exactly a client is asking for:

I think I am being explicit, and they think I'm being ambiguous, but maybe that mirrors the client relationship, where the client thinks they have said 'I want this' and the designer says 'what?'

(Programme leader comment)

The disjuncture encapsulated here extends to some degree to the experience of the EAP in-session lecturer, accustomed to exploiting high-scoring student work as a key teaching resource, since we were not given access to 'good' exemplars either!

Discussion

One great value of exploratory ethnographic research is its propensity to confound researchers' assumptions. Our project revealed unexpected, subtle ways in which students' identities as cultural workers affected perceptions of their written assignments. We had also not anticipated that their identities as users of English as an international language taking a degree in London alongside LI English home students would feature so prominently in the discussion, or that they would express such strong feelings about it. This seemed at least as important as the challenges of writing multiple genres or a hybrid transdisciplinary assessment. The perception of an L2 'us' and LI 'them' chimes with data generated in another research project we carried out looking at international students' experiences on degree programmes, in which one participant memorably stated 'I feel like a visitor'. This underlines the importance of in-session classes, indeed the EAP classroom more generally, as a 'safe place'; it is also suggestive of a broader issue related to internationalization that exceeds the remit of EAP lecturers. Further, it attests to the difficulties in isolating discussions around text from wider factors affecting students' experience of HE study.

Our student informants' comments regarding how to articulate their own voice in a theoretical essay informed by their reading of, and engagement with, academic sources echo a common difficulty among students. The desire for authorial agency, a sense of frustration as to how to achieve it within the parameters of the essay, and the confidence that the business plan will offer that opportunity, are striking. Ivanič's (1998) scheme of 'writer identity' is useful in analysing what appears to be happening here. In Ivanič's scheme, there is an autobiographical self, 'the identity which people bring with them to any act of writing, shaped as it is by their prior social and discursive history ... itself socially constructed and constantly changing as a consequence of their developing life-history' (Ivanič, 1998: 24); a discursive self, 'the impression – often multiple, sometimes contradictory – which they consciously or unconsciously convey of themselves in a particular written text' (Ivanič, 1998: 25); and the self as author, which 'concerns the writer's "voice" in the sense of the writer's position, opinions and beliefs' (Ivanič, 1998: 26). As Ivanič goes on to say, '[t]he self as author is particularly significant in academic writing, since writers differ considerably in how far they establish an authorial presence in their writing' (Ivanič, 1998: 26). Our student informants' comments indicate that the researched essay seemed to pose the biggest obstacle to aligning Ivanič's three aspects of writer identity. While genre-based analysis can be a powerful tool to raise students' awareness of how they can produce an authorial voice, our data suggests the significant impact that issues of identity can have on their response to our interventions.

However, a mobilization of the students' agency can be seen as they adapt the theories they have learned about and explored in essay writing in such a way that it might be exploited in a practical working context, so that it becomes, in a manner of speaking, their 'own business'. In this way, they take charge of the dual 'academic' and 'entrepreneur' identities implied in the contrasting writing genres, so aptly encapsulated by the student comment contrasting being the one who 'criticised the industry' and the one 'being criticised'. This shows the student's grasp of the differing interpersonal relationships – between writer and addressee – in the essay and business plan.

Indeed, the overarching theme of criticality as a common feature across the tasks has several layers of implications in terms of students' identities, and complicates the cultural disjunctures

related to the notion of ‘critical thinking’. Our data suggests that it is important to unpack what this means, not only within specific disciplines, but within particular degree programmes – especially where a shift towards transdisciplinarity destabilizes and opens up disciplinary parameters. With cultural industries related degrees, the question of criticality is bound up with a critique of the notion of ‘creativity’ within culture industries theories. Key theorists within this field are critical of neo-liberal conceptualizations of the term, which are tied up with deregulation and exploitation (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Hesmondhalgh, 2012; McRobbie, 2002).

In the case of the academic business plan, which entails a rethinking of existing models, attempts to isolate critical reflection from the acquisition of genres come under strain. This is not to say that making visible and modelling typical lexicogrammatical and discoursal features of the various genres has no value; what it emphasizes is that an analysis extending beyond a superficial or formulaic examination of textual features is required in order to facilitate the students’ ability to control and subvert them. Similarly, the limits of ‘modelling’ are foregrounded by the creative leap looked for in the innovative business plan. It points to the need for recognition and acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty as part of the writing experience.

Moreover, the idea of the degree as an experimental ‘laboratory’ that in a sense performs the precariousness of the real-life experience of the creative entrepreneur is discordant with the prevailing educational ethos in which everything must be quantified and measured. It challenges conventional notions of ‘success’, which may provoke uncertainty and self-doubt, and is at odds with the ideology of the knowledge economy. It also has implications for the relationship between the in-sessional EAP lecturer and the students. In our practice, exemplars of high-scoring student work are normally a core teaching resource for the teaching of academic writing. However, in the case of the academic business plan, it was necessary to rely on the broad template provided, and to recognize the limits of the explicit guidance we could give. While in fact the EAP lecturer tended to agree with the programme leader’s view that the template was sufficiently explicit, she too had to ‘feel’ her way to some extent. This risks undermining the EAP lecturer’s ‘expert’ status. Although potentially unsettling, this can have the positive outcome of reconfiguring the lecturer–student relationship into something more collaborative. Rather than be limited by the ‘identify and induct’ model critiqued by academic literacies, the EAP lecturer and students are more equally involved in a co-inductive process of navigating unpredictable yet creative territories.

Conclusions

Transdisciplinary degrees such as those discussed in this paper are fertile ground for transforming genre boundaries in unpredictable ways; there is an ongoing need for EAP practitioners to be mindful of the instability of genres and to be prepared to rethink their approach to students’ writing development accordingly. In particular, a more ambiguous task, such as an ‘academic’ business plan, calls into question the extent to which it is possible to ‘identify and induct’ in a straightforward manner.

Our research project provided us with some depth of understanding of the degree programmes under consideration, revealed valuable insights into the students’ experiences of their studies, and raised interesting points about the way the students’ identities were intertwined with their interpretations of their writing assessments. While it is always the case that generalizations from small-scale projects should be avoided, we would argue that the depth of insight gained from focusing on students’ perspectives allows for a more meaningful, contextualized embedding of EAP practice and promotes a fruitful rethinking of our approach to this. Further, sharing findings of such projects with subject lecturers has the potential to enhance their understandings

of, and provision for, L2 international students. Indeed, in this case, the MA CCE programme leader was interested to hear our findings. This is consistent with the transformative ethos of transdisciplinarity. Equally, in keeping with the transdisciplinary spirit of opening the borders of knowledge making, such in-depth engagement on the part of EAP lecturers can inform our understanding of our own discipline. With our project, the concept of precariousness can be considered relevant to EAP's sometimes marginalized status. Yet to undertake a project like this is not straightforward in an institutional environment where opportunities for even small-scale EAP practice research are limited. On a more positive note, EAP lecturers who already have experience of working with students across several subject disciplines may be well-suited to facing the challenges of the move towards transdisciplinary studies. Clearly, more research is needed, but the EAP lecturer's adaptability and tolerance of ambiguity may have something to offer in this area.

Notes on the contributors

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