

Resource Review

Name of reviewer:	Marcus Leaning
Job title and department:	Senior Lecturer, School of Creative Arts and Humanities
Institution:	Trinity College, Carmarthen

Name of reviewed item:	Teaching Academic Writing in UK Higher Education: Theories, Practices and Models
Author(s) / Editor(s):	Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams
Publisher / distributor details (see note below):	Palgrave Macmillan
Publication / release date:	2006
ISBN number (if applicable):	13:978-1-4039-4535-8
Technical details (if software – see note below):	
Price:	£18.99

Review:

The rapid expansion of UK higher education in the past thirty years has brought about a number of changes in the way in which British universities function. This book, part of a series that seeks to examine these and other changes in the university environment, specifically addresses issues of academic literacy and writing in British institutions in light of this expansion. The text is concerned with whether new approaches and strategies are needed to equip the seemingly academically weaker students that now, for whatever reason, populate undergraduate courses. Historically, academic policy has utilised three possible strategies for equipping students with higher-level literacy and writing skills:

The first position, often referred to as the 'acculturation model' sees no special effort being required by universities. Instead students will acquire the skills in the same way previous generations of students have – through an 'osmosis-like' process whereby they develop the skills and adopt the practices of academic life simply by being around others who do so. While this strategy has worked previously its main fault lies in that it recognises no change in either what a university does or the background of the students, both of which have altered considerably in recent years - it is a seemingly a-social and a-historical model of learning.

The second approach derives in part from recognition that a growing number of students do require additional help. Thus a number of intuitions established modules and even units and centres specifically for the development of study skills. Here students who are diagnosed or self-diagnosed as requiring additional support may receive it. The downside to this approach is that it regards such students as in some way deficient and the students become stigmatised.

The third approach, termed 'academic literacies' was initially described in seminal paper by Lea and Street (1998). This position regards the development of literacy skills as another of the core academic skills that should be factored into the curriculum regardless of the degree subject. The chapters in this volume very much espouse this position and they provide numerous examples, case studies and research findings to support the argument.

The book is composed of fourteen chapters split into three sections together with a general introduction and extensive bibliography. The first section addresses a range of general theoretical issues in the field. Chapter one looks at the general context of higher education in the UK in relation to academic writing and how it has changed over the past couple of years. Chapter two examines why writing is so important in academia and how the best results can be achieved in developing student writing by direct intervention in the actual moment of writing at the class level. Chapter three engages with the idea of multiple 'academic literacies' and regarding writing as one of several core literacies in a more detailed way. The second section looks at a number of initiatives and case studies in UK institutions. These range from a historical examination of a writing program at Richmond International University in London (chapter four); a comprehensive examination of the use writing for educational change (chapter five); a description of a specific literacy program, the 'Speak-Write Project' at Anglia-Ruskin University (chapter six). Chapter seven examines how higher-level literacy skills can be developed through a programme within an English degree. Chapter eight is a very useful chapter and discusses how writing can be integrated into a historically non-literary degree, engineering. The approach developed is interesting – a course termed *Engineering in Context* that integrates literacy skills via project work into student engineers' studies. With minor changes this model could easily be applied to other disciplines. Chapter nine looks at how an initiative at Strathclyde University has sought to develop lecturers' literacy teaching skills. The third section of the book extends the study to how other countries, the USA and Australia, have tackled the problem. Chapters explore how literacy has been taught in both of these countries, (Australia, chapter ten, the USA, chapters eleven and thirteen) and how the UK universities may learn from and respond to the experience of these countries (chapters twelve and fourteen).

This is a very interesting, important and certainly thought provoking book. The text provides numerous examples of successful programmes and indicates a few blind alleyways to be wary of. The chapters provide considerable insight into an area that does not receive its due attention in academic planning. This is particularly in evidence in the more creative fields and therefore the text is of considerable use to those in the art, design and media teaching community, especially those involved in subject development and planning. Indeed the text offers lots of ideas for ways in which literacy development could be factored into the curriculum. Unfortunately the text contains no chapters that specifically address the interest of the creative disciplines but this does not detract from what is a very useful text. Overall this is a valuable volume, deserves to be read, contributes a number of interesting chapters to the field and sets new directions for research and planning.

Lea, M. and Street. B, (1998) 'Student Writing in Higher Education: an Academic Literacies Approach', *Studies in Higher Education*, 23:2, 157-72.