CHAPTER 30

ACADEMIC LITERACIES AND THE EMPLOYABILITY CURRICULUM: RESISTING NEOLIBERAL EDUCATION?

Catalina Neculai

> Against an increasingly oppressive corporate-based globalism, educators and other cultural workers need to resurrect a language of resistance and possibility, a language that embraces a militant utopianism, while being constantly attentive to those forces which seek to turn such hope into a new slogan, or to punish and dismiss those who dare look beyond the horizon of the given.
>
> – Henry A. Giroux, 2007

Academic literacies research (hereafter AcLits) has keenly scrutinized the rapport between the knowledge and pedagogies of academic writing in higher education institutions and the dominant "institutional order of discourse" (Theresa Lillis, 2001). This sustained scrutiny has produced an understanding of academic literacy that runs against and problematizes the dominant ideological basis of the academy. Moreover, AcLits has regarded the mainstream institutional outlook on academic literacy as a homogenizing force which appears to sand down the differentials in students' academic, social, and cultural writing practices and identities across the university. In response to this academic homogenization, AcLits has recognized the plurality and heterogeneity of academic literacy (see the AcLits special issue of *The Journal of Applied Linguistics 4*(1)) and offered solutions for active dialogic and transparent writing pedagogies (Lillis, 2001, 2005). Since the birth of AcLits in the 1990s, such theorizing has taken place against the backdrop of an increasingly neoliberal educational apparatus that has sought to link the formation and mutations of a particular subject—in university parlance, the formation of a particular graduate—with the economic system of business and enterprise. This neoliberal educational project has gained dominance by means of certain "techniques of the self" (Graham Burchell, 1996), amongst which the skills-driven curriculum of employability is the most evident.

While AcLits has not overtly engaged with the neoliberal essence of today's higher education institutional order of discourse (for a veiled attempt, see Paul Sutton, 2011), it may provide a solid research matrix for interrogating the neoliberal agenda, and particularly its underlying assumptions with regard to the teaching and learning

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of academic writing. AcLits may not offer an immediate solution or programmatic response to neoliberal institutional practices but it could help writing teachers and researchers in their various local contexts envisage possibilities for contestation, resistance or change (for "utopian pedagogies" of resistance against neoliberalism, see Mark Coté, Richard J. F. Day & Greig de Peuter, 2007). In this transformative spirit, two questions need to be asked: how can we make academic writing less instrumental in the reproduction of the neoliberal order? How can we shift our language and pedagogies in order to subvert rather than maintain this order?

In this chapter, I explore possible answers to these questions by focusing on a specific programme initiated at Coventry University, UK, which aims at increasing students' "employability" after graduation (for details, see http://www.coventry.ac.uk/study-at-coventry/student-support/enhance-your-employability/add-vantage/). This undergraduate scheme, referred to as Add+Vantage modules, includes modules on academic writing which are delivered by the Centre for Academic Writing (CAW) and in my discussion I focus in particular on a third year module, "Academic Writing: Your Dissertation or Final Year Project." In my analysis, I implicitly acknowledge the institutional, curricular, disciplinary, and social spaces of academic literacies afforded by the employability curriculum while trying to project a counterhegemonic stance in line with the AcLits position formulated at the start. My argument is that, in pertaining to the employability scheme, the teaching of academic writing suffers from an inescapable double bind of compliance and resistance with the neoliberal order. On the one hand, CAW's undergraduate writing provision mainly exists because of this neoliberal agenda whereby a new university like ours seeks to trace students' post-graduation career pathways. On the other hand, the very existence of this provision is vulnerable as it depends, in turn, on the existence of the employability scheme and on the ways in which the scheme chooses to define and make room for the teaching and learning of academic writing. This institutional vulnerability of our modules means that attempting to question or challenge the neoliberal status quo, its language and writing ideologies is fraught with difficulties.

At this point, a couple of caveats are worth noting. Firstly, I articulate the following viewpoints and interpretations in my capacity as convenor for the Dissertation module as well as a member of the team of lecturers at CAW who deliver the suite of academic writing courses (hence the use of the collective "we," representing our joint efforts to streamline the modules). Secondly, I avow an ideological bias against the dominant neoliberal values in higher education whereby the teaching and learning of academic writing are simply instrumental in the production of "commercially oriented professionals" (Kathleen Lynch, 2006, p. 2). Instead, I conceive of academic writing development as a process of consciousness-raising, a democratization of literacy practices, conducive to personal and collective intellectual, social and cultural development.

ACADEMIC WRITING IN THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

The values, principles and relations in our society are dictated by the values, principles and relations in the marketplace. Succinctly put, this equation represents the nature of neoliberal ideology, which underlies the contemporary culture of commercial profit, entrepreneurship, commodification and flexible specialization (for a brief, yet compelling analysis of neoliberalism, see David Harvey, 2005). The implications for higher education in the trans-Atlantic space have been highly visible: the heavy privatization of its resources (Lynch, 2006), the unabashed promotion of a market-driven and market-targeted educational system, the loss of critical literacy (Henry A. Giroux, 2011), "the cult of expertise" (Giroux, 2008, p. 1), increasingly blunted capacities for democratization, civic engagement, and academic freedom from the constraints of the market (Giroux, 2008). Academic "performativity" (Stephen J. Ball, 2012), audit and measurements of impact, satisfaction, and performance have become unquestioned systemic currencies in the neoliberal academy.

One of the local consequences of the neoliberal order has been an institutional concern with employability as a set of formally acquired skills, knowledge and competences. According to this agenda, reaching "the positive destination" at the end of the university degree is more than an accidental or implicit bonus of learning and participating in the university cultures, of studying a discipline or a number of interrelated disciplines. Employment is regarded as the net result of strategic teaching and learning of work-related skills, supplemented by privileged access to the world of employers and employment throughout the duration of the degree. In the United Kingdom, new universities which, historically, have a vocational orientation, have been even more attuned to the employability programme. Coventry University, in particular, has introduced the Add+Vantage scheme in line with its corporate mission: "employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship" (Coventry University, 2012b). While the university prides itself on its entrepreneurial achievements, it also measures its success by the support offered to its students and by aiming to create cohesive communities and viable local and trans-local partnerships. This apparent antinomy between a calculative, market-driven institutional spirit and a humanistic inclination is also built into the university's undergraduate employability curriculum.

The Add+Vantage scheme is intended to add employability value in two ways. Firstly, it seeks to cultivate in students a set of personal competences required in the labour market, such as flexibility, decisiveness, self-confidence, or reflectiveness, alongside a set of pragmatic abilities such as problem solving or written/oral communication skills. Secondly, it attempts to produce a number of pre-defined selves: the "global," the "creative," the "entrepreneurial," the "influential," the "community-focused," or the "e-graduate" (Coventry University, 2012a).

The range of themes under which the various modules are offered include: work experience and skills, global languages and perspectives, enterprise and entrepreneurship, professional accreditation and development, and research skills. While the scheme is administratively coordinated by the Careers Office, its component modules are designed and delivered by academic staff in faculties and departments. Departmental boards of study assure the quality of the module design, delivery and assessment while student surveys measure satisfaction rates. Add+Vantage serves all three years of study and although peripheral to the degree curriculum, it is both a credited and mandatory programme for all undergraduate students; in other words, it is a prerequisite for graduation. Students enroll on the programme at the start of every academic year and can choose a different module each year. Students' registration takes place on a first-come, first-served basis, which means that they may not always be able to attend the module of their choice. Class numbers are limited to 24 students, with a module spanning ten weeks, in two-hour weekly iterations.

In the Add+Vantage programme, the modules offered by CAW sit under the rubric of research skills. By taking part in the scheme alongside the other faculties, the Centre for Academic Writing has gained a foothold in one strand of the university curriculum which has opened up possibilities for participation in a faculty board and in departmental affairs, for the creation of a new platform publicizing and promoting the other kinds of writing facilitation at CAW as well as mediated access to departmental resources and inside writing practices. Active cross-fertilisations happen between the teaching of writing through the scheme, the academic writing tutors' one-to-one work with students and the lecturers' consultations with academic staff on their teaching of writing in the disciplines. Thus opportunities for a systemic, more complex approach to writing instruction within the university become available to CAW (for a full profile of CAW, see Mary Deane & Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, 2012).

CHALLENGING DESIGN: WHICH LITERACY? WHOSE LITERACY?

In a neoliberal understanding, academic and workplace literacy are regarded as co-extensive and become reified into something that is always already there in the form of standards, norms, rules or correctness, said to be defined and dictated a priori by employers (Romy Clark & Roz Ivanič, 1997, pp. 214-215; Fiona Doloughan, 2001, pp. 17, 24). Thus, literacy has become a catalyst in "the production of particular kinds of knowledge and *sanctioned knowers*" (Cindi Katz, 2005, p. 231—emphasis mine), which places universities unapologetically, "at the heart of the knowledge economy" (David Blunkett, as cited in Jonathan Rutherford, 2001; Katharyne Mitchell, 2003, p. 397). It is in this sense that the pedagogization of employability cannot be severed from "the pedagogization of literacy" (Brian Street,

1995, p. 113) whereby instilling knowledge of writing legitimates and scaffolds graduates' future writing-intensive roles in the service economy. The production of writing in the knowledge economy, characterized by a global reach and trans-national networked practices, is often seen, by employers and academic institutions alike, to rest on a generic, stable literacy infrastructure which could be transferred successfully from locale to locale due to the erosion of national economic and industrial boundaries. Employers' demands for demonstrable writing abilities are thus oblivious to the contexts of various communicational acts (Doloughan, 2001, p. 24) and writing practices. Such disregard for writing in context may in fact preclude transferability and render the undifferentiated instruction of academic and workplace literacies an unaccomplished project from the start.

The writing ideology of transferability and objectification transpires in the ways CAW is called upon to build and teach its three-year set of Add+Vantage modules, which, upon first reading, represent everything that the AcLits paradigm has sought to debunk in the writing-*qua*-skills model. Firstly, the recruitment process seldom permits students' enrolment on the CAW writing modules for three consecutive years, which thwarts possibilities for creating a developmental framework akin to an undergraduate writing curriculum. Secondly, randomized enrolment results in amalgamated cohorts of students with different disciplinary affiliations that are difficult to manage pedagogically. Yet, these two insufficiencies of design have not remained unchallenged. Historically, we have made efforts to channel the enrolment process and cluster students in keeping with *meaningful* differences and disciplinary affiliations. As a result, the former first year module "Introduction to Writing at University," a generic, rite of passage-type of module, was divided into three distinct paths: "Academic Writing for (Applied) Sciences," "Academic Writing for Social Sciences," "Academic Writing for Arts and Humanities." While we acknowledge the internal variations of these makeshift disciplinary formations (Mike Baynham, 2000), controlled heterogeneity has secured a commonality of students' academic affiliations, an academic lowest common denominator, which has helped forge a more cohesive writing community with each Add+Vantage module and class. Furthermore, in order to articulate the cultural and critical underpinnings of literacy practices, another first year module has been developed: "English Academic Writing in a Global Context." However, unlike year one provision, in the second and third years, "Developing Academic Writing Skill" and "Academic Writing: Your Dissertation or Final Year Project" do not, as yet, follow a disciplinary logic.

There are also other, more subcutaneous ways in which we have questioned the neoliberal underpinnings of the employability programme. Each module descriptor (see Table 30.1) addresses the employability agenda in an oblique way by highlighting the contribution of academic writing to students' developments in their own fields of study while the lexicon of neoliberalism is almost absent in these descriptors, thus creating a type of resistance through indifference. By engendering

an elsewhere and a pretext for student writing that intersects with the curricular space of subject degrees, the CAW writing modules also draw upon, help build or even challenge disciplinary writing spaces. Moreover, through a series of "codes," such as *genre*, *criticality*, the concept of *writing as a process* and as *discourse*, the module descriptors also create a space for academic writing as a field of knowledge and practice in its own right. This epistemological space is further expanded and explored through the writing-infused lexicon of the syllabi and assignment briefs, and through the relational, writing-aware nature of seminar activities and assignment production. Fully articulating and accounting for the disciplinary hybridity of students as well as for the inherent variations in their individual writing expertise and practice still remains a utopian project. However, the changes in design and practice show that the CAW modules are not stagnant curricular and pedagogical constructions.

THE DISSERTATION: ADVANCING INTELLECTUAL LITERACIES

One example of non-compliance is the third year module, "Academic Writing: Your Dissertation or Final Year Project." This is a peculiar case in point not only because of its great success amongst students (six different iterations are currently being taught, with only three two years ago) but also due to its temporal proximity to graduation and therefore to the much invoked "positive destination" (see for example of this employability discourse http://www.pkc.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=13188&p=0). Designed as a companion to students' processes and practices of dissertation writing in their own subjects, the title unsettles the stability of the dissertation genre by allowing for alternative final year research projects beside the conventional dissertation. In some disciplines, such as engineering or performance studies, the alternatives to dissertations are the report on design or the so-called long essay. During the module, covert tensions exist, at times, between entrenched, legitimized dissertation writing conventions, such as the classical IMRaD macro-structure (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion), and their disciplinary or individual project variations, or between IMRaD structures in the social sciences and thematic mappings in arts and humanities projects. Inevitably, departmental academic writing cultures and departmental guidelines (where these exist) also come into play, making the Add+Vantage module a site of debate over more stable, consistent meanings of dissertation writing as product, process and practice. In a sense, the module's success also stems from students' desire for coherent and consolidated textual and research practices. That is why, turning atomized literacy practices into synergetic ones, without homogenizing writing teaching and learning, is a primary pedagogic challenge.

Table 30.1: Academic writing vs. neoliberal focus in selected module descriptors

Module Titles	Overt Academic Writing Lexicon	Covert Neoliberal Lexicon
Year 1 Academic Writing for: • Sciences • Health and Social Studies • Arts and Humanities	• learning about academic genres and cultures associated with degree subjects • researching, planning, revising and editing texts • interrogating genre conventions of argument-based essay writing, report writing, reflective writing and case studies	developing students' employability in subject-related careers by enhancing their written communication in relevant genres
Year 2 Academic Writing: • Developing Skill in Academic Writing	• reviewing the concept of writing as a process • introducing strategies for structuring and developing academic papers • analyzing written texts • assessing a range of sources when researching • constructing an academic argument • learning appropriate reflection and referencing skills using *The Coventry University Harvard Reference Style* • writing as a primary medium through which students' knowledge is developed and assessed	contributing to Personal Development Planning (PDP)
Year 3 Academic Writing: • Your Dissertation or Final Year Project	• conceptualizing, planning, drafting, revising and editing final-year projects and dissertations • focusing on "evaluate," "synthesize," "argue" and "reflect"—articulating the place of these types of discourse and practices in academic communication	acquiring and developing competences that contribute to academic development and, implicitly, to future workplace roles that are increasingly writing intensive.

In order to respond to this challenge, the main thrust of the module, which guides my work as a pedagogue, is the advancement of *intellectual literacies* as a

complex set of literacy practices that are not simply entrenched in and determined by academic, institutional imperatives. The logic is that by enhancing the intellectuality of my teaching of writing, I implicitly minimize or disregard the mercantile attributes of the neoliberal order. This task is even harder and very sensitive to openly acknowledge in formal institutional settings, such as boards of study, since the neoliberal educational status quo is generally maintained covertly through the marketing of academic writing as a set of transferable, trans-local and trans-disciplinary competences. In its attempts to probe the depths of final year academic writing for research, the module draws attention to the linkages that exist between modes of active reading, active thinking, and active writing inside and outside of academia. The dissertation becomes then a pretext for such probing. I do not wish, however, to invalidate the importance of students' preparation for their graduate careers, but simply to plead for a holistic, non-segregationist approach to student career development that could also feature in the teaching and learning of academic writing *through* the disciplines. This possibility is, in fact, granted by the relational nature of academic literacies: the relations between texts and students, between students' identities and the conventions of their research writing, between students' thinking, reading, and writing practices.

During the ten weeks of the module, students bring to the table the diversity of their individual research projects, the heterogeneity of their writing knowledge and experience, the fluidity of their disciplinary affiliations. Their intellectual labour is only pre-coded in the themes of the syllabus (see the second column in Table 30.2) which include: macro and micro-level modes of textual construction; register, writerly identity, and voice; problem identification, definition, and exploration; critiquing; methodological frameworks; peer reviewing, addressing feedback through revising and editing. This generic "technological" design becomes a unifying principle in class, thus creating a commonality of literacy practices and a matrix of shared goals. The workshop activities, on the other hand, (the third column) are centred on the students and propose a relational, constructivist mode of engagement with writing.

Furthermore, three features of the "Dissertation" module make of it a more complex matrix of teaching and learning than the neoliberal skills-driven model might indicate. First, class activities frame individual writing practices and processes dialogically: discussing in pairs or collectively emotional and cognitive aspects of academic writing in general, and of dissertation writing in particular, exploring individual knowledge of writing, expectations, frustrations, and challenges through dialogue and keeping dissertation writing diaries. These are complemented by a session dedicated to the double peer-reviewing of the coursework draft assigned for summative assessment. In conjunction with this, formative written feedback to writing is complemented by "talkback" (Lillis, 2005) in class and during office hours, thus generating opportunities for one to one tutorials to accompany class

Table 30.2: Sample syllabus—"Your Dissertation or Final Year Project"

Module Outline (N.B. Seminar themes and workshop activities may be subject to change, depending on your writing requirements, class interactions and discussions.)		
Week:	**Seminar themes**	**Workshop activities**
1.	The module: workshops, assignment, deadlines; dissertation writing vs. other writing.	Warm-up discussions and reflections.
2.	The process, practice and genre of dissertation writing: from proposal to project.	Discuss the role the following factors may play in your dissertation writing: your dissertation proposal, your own writing practices and knowledge of academic writing, your colleagues and your supervisor, your interest in your subject, your vocational aspirations.
3.	Style and language use: words, sentences and paragraphs.	Use and analyze formal features of academic writing in contrast with other writing.
4.	Working with the dissertation structure: why introductions come first and conclusions last.	Analyze samples of dissertation structures; write an outline of your own dissertation structure, detailing the role of each section.
5.	Reading for the dissertation (1): summaries, arguments and critiques.	Write a summary and critique of an article which you will use for your dissertation, and will have read in advance of the seminar.
6.	Reading for the dissertation (2): the literature review as intellectual dialogue.	• Write a mock literature review based on two articles that you will use in your dissertation and will have read in advance of the seminar. • Analyze literature review samples.
7.	Your dissertation: So what? Questions, niches, problems and claims; analyzing introductions.	Identify topics, questions and problems in sample dissertation introductions; identify your own dissertation topic, main questions and potential problem to solve.
8.	Working with evidence: research methods, data analysis, the ethics of research.	• Identify and write the rationale for choosing your research methods and type of data analysis; reflect on the ethical dimensions of your research. • Planning your assignment with a view to producing a draft by next week.
9.	Peer reviewing week	Bring a draft of your assignment to class for peer reviewing
10.	Abstract writing and executive summaries/Assignment editing and revising.	• Analyze abstracts and executive summaries. • Revise and edit your assignment draft.

interactions. Second, differences in disciplinary discourses are actively brought to bear upon discussions by: teasing out variations in formal conventions (structuring and style in particular); highlighting the tight connection between producing and interrogating knowledge in students' particular subjects and dissertation projects; constructing problems and critiquing academic literature from within disciplinary frameworks, whereby students are asked to explore and share articles relevant to their work. Last, the module construes academic writing as a subject of knowledge, reflection and evaluation. Students are thus inducted into a new discipline, a functional field with its own meta-codes, discourses and community of practice. This transformation of academic writing from an infrastructure of support into a discipline is achieved in at least two ways: through an assessment design that is analytical and reflective in nature, either focusing on comparing and analyzing student and published writing, reflecting on the complex dimensions of one's own dissertation writing or comparing previous coursework writing with dissertation writing; by means of a reading list that telescopes the field's recent incursions into academic writing as product, process and practice. These two approaches come together in the requirement that students substantiate their analyses and reflections on writing through recourse to academic writing literature.

CONCLUSIONS

The neoliberal order of discourse and its educational corollaries have already started to produce a body of research into writing for employability or writing for the knowledge economy, in its milder, non-politicized variety (Deborah Brandt, 2005; University of Bath, 2011-2012; Juliet Thondhlana & Julio Gimenez, 2011) or research into the collusive relations between literacy and neoliberalism, in its more radical and ideologically resistant form (David Block et al., 2012; Christian Chun, 2008). This paper aligns itself with the latter strand of research with the hope of recapturing the role of academic literacies in "creatively transforming human culture" (The Miami Plan as cited in Jill Swiencicki, 1998, p. 27) with its diverse voices and identities as those found in the academic writing class. Through some of AcLits' valuable formulations, I have sought to indicate how the academic writing employability modules delivered by the Centre for Academic Writing at Coventry University minimize and disrupt the workings of the neoliberal Add+Vantage teaching scheme, thus making academic writing less instrumental in the reproduction of the neoliberal order of discourse. In my analysis, I have adopted the combined position of a "long-marcher," who voices an ideological Marxist critique, and of a "whistle-blower," who interrogates the incorporation of academic writing from within a corporatized framework of teaching writing (Dyer-Witheford, 2007, p. 49). Ethical dilemmas abound, but so does the hope that academic writing will eventually build its own spaces of knowledge-making and practice-honing, free of neoliberal dictates.

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