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THE SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION OF ACADEMIC LITERACY DEVELOPMENT AND THE EXPLICIT TEACHING OF GENRES AS COMMUNITY HEURISTICS

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Abstract

In this article I argue that literacy classes in post-secondary institutions can play a pivotal role in the development of Generation 1.5 students' academic literacy and, consequently, their ability to persist and succeed in higher education. Rather than looking at these students' linguistic and sociocultural repertoire from a deficit standpoint, faculty can teach academic literacy with the whole community and its expectations and conventions in mind, and do so explicitly at a variety of levels—academic, linguistic, historical and sociocultural— in a way that both respects and validates the students' values and cultural experiences. As such, a genre-based literacy class which focuses on academic literacy development as one aspect of a broader effort to help students negotiate a new academic culture within and without the literacy classroom appears to be a viable approach to Generation 1.5 academic literacy development needs.

Introduction

All communities can be defined by their many cultural, social, and linguistic conventions. Both as identifying and distinguishing characteristics of communities, such conventions are not just the result of the values participants hold and the activities they engage in; these values and activities *are* the conventions themselves which bring and hold communities together. The "reciprocal social arrangements of mutual benefit" (Brodkey, 1987, p. 8) which define each community are, in reality, not truly fixed and stable traits but rather the "integrated constellations of community practices" each group engages in (Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002, p. 211). As communities of practice, bound by tacit linguistic, cultural, and social agreements among their members, academic institutions such as universities and colleges are no exception.

Naturally, all people share membership in a variety of small and large communities into which they carry their "linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 22). Although within each university and college there are many discipline-specific communities, as a whole, faculty and administrative personnel and staff, who share and pass community characteristics from graduating class to graduating class, do so on the basis of their life experience and value system.

The values and cultural practices of academic communities everywhere are embedded in the fabric of the larger society and share many of the same values and practices that society at large espouses. For this reason, Robinson (1992) argues, the main values of American academe are (1) individualism and competition: grading on the curve, independent work, individual responsibility, and strict cheating policies; (2) equality and informality: access to education, grading and assessment, teacher-student relationship, and social status; and (3) pragmatism and reasoning style: getting "to the point" in the discourse, practical applications, critical thinking skills, active participation, and time orientation. These activity-traits of universities and colleges have emerged as the finely tuned expression of broader social and cultural values which are best evidenced in the academic literate practices of these institutions.

While linguistic identity and language use are two of any sociocultural group's most defining characteristics, probably in none is it more so than in academic communities, where language mediates and enables all other experience and activity. Johns (1997), for instance, argues that the existence of academic communities is based on the mutual contract and interaction of the social context, the texts produced, and the roles that both the readers and the writers play as they come to know "particular content, languages, and

practices . . . strategies for understanding, discussing, organizing, and producing texts." (p. 2). Academic literacy, therefore, can only be understood in light of the close interrelationship of what is written and read, who reads and writes, and when, how, and where it is done. Thus, knowledge-making and knowledge-transmitting processes become paramount to academic success as they constitute the defining core of the social and cultural practices of the academic community itself.

Academically literate individuals, then, in order to successfully produce and decode written texts, need to be able to do more than read and write; they need to have a shared knowledge of and experience with the cultural and social practices of these institutions. Such experience, however, can only develop "through the participation in culturally mediated, historically developing, practical activity involving cultural practices and tools" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21). Through guided participation, incoming college students can be initiated into the lifework of the university. As Bartholomae asserted almost 20 years ago, "What our beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves, by successive approximations, into the commonplaces, set phrases, ritual and gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions and necessary connections [that characterize academic discourse]" (1985, p. 146).

If indeed, as Rogoff (2003) asserts, all human development is a cultural process attained through participation in the regular activities of a community, it would seem that the transition to and acquisition of postsecondary academic literacy should be a fairly natural and seamless next step in a student's post-K–12 personal and academic development. That, however, is not always the case. The adaptation to the higher education system has been shown to be difficult for a large number of students,

particularly those whose previous participation in the K–12 academic community did not prepare them for the exigencies of higher education.

Student Transition and Adaptation to the Academic Community

Recent careful thinking and work in the area of first-year student experience has brought to the fore pertinent issues as they relate to the academic literacy skills, adaptation, and consequent retention of students in higher education (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Miller, Groccia, & Miller, 2001; Auster & MacRone, 1994); however, with few exceptions (Gardner, 2003; Hernandez, 2000, among others) most of this work and thinking has focused on the so-called mainstream students. In spite of progressively more diverse student bodies, with different past cultural and academic experiences and needs, many administrators, faculty, and staff still tend to primarily design programs, curricula, and materials which focus on the needs of the majority of new college students who, to a greater or lesser degree, arrive with relatively high levels of social, cultural, linguistic, and academic ease and sophistication as they relate to the expectations of academic communities in North America.

While institutions of higher learning theoretically accept that students need to be socialized into the life and work which takes place within their walls, they also have high expectations for what students should be able to do once they enter college. In the *Statement of Competencies Expected of Students Entering California's Public Colleges and Universities*, the Academic Senate for California's Public Colleges and Universities (2002) outlines 131 objectives comprised within, among others, categories such as habits of the mind essential for success, reading competencies, comprehension and retention, depth of understanding, invention, and technology competencies—all considered as pre-

requisites for success at the college level. The authors conclude, "All of the elements of academic literacy discussed in this report—reading, writing, listening, speaking, use of technology, and habits of the mind that foster academic success—are expected of entering freshmen across all college disciplines" (Academic Senate for California's Public Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 35). These threshold expectations are probably reasonable for a large percentage of the freshman classes but not for all students.

Socialized in middle-class families, whose patterns of interaction more naturally prepare them for school, many native English-speaking students transit from the K–12 public education system to higher education having had a strong introduction to the principles of academic literacy. Citing Harbour, Middleton, Lewis and Anderson (2003), Davies, Safarik, and Banning (2003) state, "In much of North America, White privilege or dominant culture privilege encompasses situations in which those of dominant culture status conscious or unconsciously use and benefit from their 'invisible knapsack of special provisions'" (p. 2-3). Monolingual in their majority, these students have attended school in English from the age of five in a social and cultural context which closely resembles the kind of home environment and activities which characterize their parents' and their cultural and social background, values, and activities. As a result, these students' college adaptation process requires that they make some adjustments such as more careful personal study habits and heavier academic workloads, but which are often mind-enlarging at best or a bit uncomfortable at worst.

As a result of different first language-literacy levels and experiences which are closely tied to social background and culture-specific patterns of interaction, Generation 1.5 students tend to be socialized differently from mainstream students. In Mexican-

American and other Latino homes and communities, for example, children traditionally learn by watching grown-ups model behavior rather than being expected or allowed to learn by trial and error or by verbalizing their own experience as is often the case in European-American homes. In addition, adult verbal interaction with the children usually takes place in the contextualized setting of daily routines in which children do not usually initiate conversation and seldom participate in the decontextualized language of adult discussions.

The linguistic, cultural, and social traditions and practices of immigrant homes in North America are an amalgam of activities which historically have allowed those communities to persist and thrive. The same is true of the majority community culture in North America. As such, judgment values between such communities do not constitute a promising starting point for discussion. As we attempt to find ways to help immigrant children succeed academically, Davies, Safarik, and Banning (2003) admonish us not to look at these students' cultural and social practices and values through a deficit lens.

There is a tendency to describe the characteristics of Generation 1.5 and other language-minority students on the basis of what they lack in comparison with their middle-class, English-speaking counterparts. Such descriptions of these students usually focus on the ways in which their home socialization processes and first literacy development negatively interfere with their academic work. In addition, these students' group or culture-specific values are often treated as permanent characteristics rather than evidence of active participation in a community. On the topic, Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) state:

> Our references to “migrants” and “English-language-learners” and their practices . . . [should be] used as *descriptors* rather than as categorical classification of individuals or groups. . . . [Students’] individual development and disposition must be understood in (not separate from) cultural and historical context . . . We talk about patterns of people’s approaches to given situations without reducing the explanation to a claim that they do what they do *because* they are migrant farm workers or English-language learners. (p. 22)

Partly due to causal and deficit approaches to English-learning students’ academic development, many of these students who now attend colleges and universities do not develop additive academic literacy competence in the K–12 system. By accepting English-learning students’ first language and literacy experiences as a valid and dynamic process, albeit different from that of the majority, teachers and administrators in the K–16 educational system, can support the development of these students’ expanded range of academic literacy competencies required to succeed.

The High School –University Connection

In their statement of competencies for academic literacy, the Academic Senate for California’s Public Colleges and Universities (2002) calls for extensive language preparation in the K–12 system for minority-language students by stressing that “the K–12 system has the potential to bring all students into eligibility for admission to post-secondary institutions” (p. 30). For a variety of reasons, though, that potential is seldom realized. Such reasons include (1) the extra time it takes English learners to acquire grade-level academic English proficiency, (2) the quality and length of formal education in their home or first language, (3) the age at which students were first exposed to the

target language, and (4) the age at which they begin their formal education in English (Cummins, 2001; Collier, 1989, 1992).

The results from Moore and Zainuddin's study (2003) in which they compared the data of three administrations of the Florida Writing Assessment Program of over one million fully proficient English (FEP) students against that of 178,000 English-language learners (ELLs) further corroborated some of Cummins' and Collier's earlier findings. According to Moore and Zainuddin's data, English-language learners who started formal schooling in the 4th grade took 3-5 years to achieve linguistic parity with their FEP counterparts while students entering school between 8th and 10th grade took 5-6+ years. What these results seem to show is that the age and grade level at which English learners start their formal schooling in English are good indicators of how long it will take for them to develop their academic English competency during their junior high and high school years.

The process of acquisition of college-level academic literacy, and all it presupposes, entails, and facilitates, starts well before students are admitted to a university or college. In this process, majority students benefit from the overlap between their own linguistic practices and social and cultural values and those of society at-large. As they enter post-secondary institutions, their past K–12 academic literacy experiences play a crucial role both as a prerequisite to and as a strong foundation upon which college academic literacy can be further developed.

The development of college-level academic literacy by Generation 1.5 students is usually more complex due to, among other reasons, the mismatch between these students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the majority's academic socialization processes

of most schools. As immigrant children themselves, Generation 1.5 students generally have come from backgrounds which include "isolated rural communities with one-room schools, refugee camps, war-torn countries, and families with persistent migration patterns" (Hamayan, 1994, p. 281). Depending on their parents' reasons for and time of immigration to the United States, these students may have attended all, most or only part of the K-12 public school program in North America. Other *descriptor* traits of Generation 1.5 students' pre-collegiate experience may include:

1. Parents who may or may not be literate in their first language.
2. Little or no exposure to environmental print in pre-literate years.
3. Home and K-12 school situations of subtractive bilingualism.
4. Schools in less affluent areas with few resources and less qualified teachers.
5. Removal from ESL classes in the K-12 public system with only functional English competence.
6. Lack of experience with decontextualized language typical of academic literacy.
7. Exposure to lower-level knowledge and interaction with teachers due to naturally slowly emerging academic bilingualism and literacy.
8. Tracking on the basis of linguistic development and/or perceived or real academic deficits.
9. Culturally and academically-based tension in interaction with K-12 teachers.

As Generation 1.5 students start attending college, teachers and administrators need to be aware that these may be some of the *descriptors* which may have characterized these students' past personal and academic experience. In addition, we must remember that, although they have graduated from high school in North America, Gen. 1.5 students are

still academic English language learners with the need to continue their academic literacy acquisition at a more sophisticated level.

In its report, the Academic Senate for California's Public Colleges and Universities (2002) concluded that although educators see the need for L2 instruction for recent immigrants,

> It is less obvious to those same educators or their administrators that L2 students who have received most, if not all, of their education in California schools, may continue to have special *academic* literacy needs. College faculty who work closely on literacy development with long-term immigrants and American-born L2 learners (often referred to as 1.5 generation) recognize that many of these students, too, fall well behind their native English speaking peers in meeting the demands of advanced level academic work. (p. 29)

Some high schools have made systemic changes in ways that support Generation 1.5 students' transition to college while others have developed more or less successful programs to prepare students for such a transition (Goldschmidt, Notzold, & Miller, 2003). However, there is a need for higher education institutions to take concrete steps to facilitate Generation 1.5 transition and success in higher education institutions (Gregory, 1997). These students come to college without the "cultural capital" or "the knowledge one needs to learn about college, how to be admitted, how to gain financial aid, and how to succeed in the dominant culture classes" (Davies et. al, 2003, p. 853). As such, for these students, the development of academic literacy includes a variety of skills and attributes which impact their ability to persist at the goal of graduating from college.

Community colleges, for example, play an important role as high-school-to-college bridges for Generation 1.5 students. However, in their review of 491 articles written for the *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, of which 65 dealt with "historically underrepresented people," Davies, Safarik, and Banning (2003) discovered that none of the 65 articles dealt with the important issues of student transition to college, as well as their needs and ability to persist and achieve their goals. Adger (1996) suggests that although "LEP [Limited English Proficiency] and other "at risk" students are frequently cited as justifications for why reforms are needed, they are rarely included in any specific way in the reforms themselves" (p. 1, in Gandara, 1994). One way these students' adaptation needs can be better met is through a more careful look at their academic literacy development needs.

Transition to Higher Education

In spite of the coping mechanisms these students have developed, the discrepancy between their past cultural, social and academic experiences and the present demands of college participation, forces Generation 1.5 students to have to make considerable academic literacy gains in order to participate and persist.

Generation 1.5 students' inadequate academic literacy preparation is often a result of the inadequate time they spent in a course of English language instruction. In the K–12 system, students who start showing signs of being functionally fluent in English are often taken out of English language classes without having had the chance to develop their academic fluency. Without an instructionally supported transition between the contextualized nature of conversational English and the abstract and decontextualized nature of academic English, these students fall behind as they struggle to make sense of

knowledge they have neither the conceptual basis nor the language to negotiate. As the Commission asserts, "Many L2 students have been designated FEP [Full English Proficiency] on the basis of their oral fluency. Considerable evidence suggests, however, that this designation fails to measure learners' proficiency in academic English, which requires dispositions and skills beyond those of conversational fluency (Academic Senate for California's Public Colleges and Universities, 2002, p. 30). As a result, college academic literacy classes must address the full range of literacy needs of these students.

Academic Literacy as Socioliteracy

Although we often think of literacy in terms of the discrete skills of being able to read and write, the manifestation of these skills generally takes place in a way that is "deemed appropriate to and by a community" (Brodkey, 1987, p. 3). As a result, the literate practices of communities are always socio-cultural acts in which one constructs meaning on the basis of one's prior experiences, linguistic background, and cultural frame of reference (Hudelson, 1994). In order to be successful, and particularly in post-secondary education, readers and writers must understand the close relationship between the writing process, the texts produced and the social and cultural contexts of the community in which such production takes place (Johns, 1997). College-level academic literacy, therefore, can only be conceived by the close interrelationship of its linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions because it "constructed in everyday life, through interactional exchanges and the negotiation of meaning in many different contexts" (Cook-Gumperz, 1986, p. 2).

Given the centrality of language to the academic processes taking place within the university community, it makes sense for academic literacy development to take center

stage in the full range of Generation 1.5 students' higher education socialization activities. Voss & Silfries (1996), for example, affirm that since 85% of learning in college comes from independent reading . . . students' primary objective ought to be to become fluent in academic literacy" (cited in Maloney, 2003, p. 2). However, academic literacy is much more than reading textbooks and writing papers. As careful attention is given to the development of academic literacy, students will develop and learn "a range of specific uses of print . . . and a collection of lifelong habits and processes that enable one, through practice and reflection, to further develop, improve, and expand the literacy abilities one already possesses" (Mikulecky, Albers, and Peers, 1994, p. 1).

Generation 1.5 students entering college often have difficulty demonstrating adequate academic literacy skills for at least three fairly obvious reasons: (1) the natural transition process all students go through as they enter a new academic community with new linguistic and socio-cultural practices and conventions; (2) the inadequate academic literacy preparation they received in the K-12 system; and closely related to the two previous reasons, (3) the discrepancy between the cultural-historical practices of the communities in which they were raised and live and those of the academic community they are seeking to join. For this reason the acquisition of college-level academic literacy is a multifaceted endeavor which goes well beyond linguistic ability and ease.

With neither the social networks nor the cultural capital in the majority culture of the academy, Generation 1.5 students have "neither the experience nor the confidence to attempt to mimic its conventions" (Maloney, 2003, p. 2). August and Hakuta (1997), in their report on improving schooling for minority students, suggest that just the critical process of negotiating and working out rules for classroom participation is much harder

in a second language. This because the students have to use decontextualized language to construct content in a way that is culturally appropriate. Hence, the job of truly supporting the development of these students' emergent academic literacy requires a broad view of all academic literacy means and entails. According to Cook-Gumperz (1986) that means that those who teach literacy should probably "provide not just a technical skill but also a set of prescriptions about using knowledge. (p.1) . . . [because] literacy is a metacognitive process that makes other cognitive and social developments possible" (p. 3). Cook-Gumperz concludes:

> Central to an understanding of how literacy reflects the knowledge base of the society are such questions as whether literacy makes available cognitive skills which could be used in any context, whether it generates new knowledge, and whether literacy gives either specific knowledge or skills and strategies which can be generalized and applied to quite different problems. (p. 16)

Since a large component of cognitive development is cultural (Rogoff & Chavajay, 1995), the connection between academic practices and cognitive development is important to consider. For this reason, the academic literacy class can and should play a pivotal role in the cognitive development of students and by extension, their academic literacy acquisition and socialization processes. In the minds of students and of the teacher, the academic literacy class needs to be more than just another class. It should become a model learning community in which "students receive multiple forms of assistance and participate in rigorous learning activities that extend their initial approaches to learning and participation." (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003, p. 21)

The call to those of us in charge of curriculum development and teaching of literacy classes is to ask ourselves how we can best theoretically conceive, conceptually design, effectively develop, and successfully implement academic literacy instruction which both facilitates the acquisition of those skills in the context of the literacy class and gives students the linguistic and socioculturally appropriate tools to use those skills in their whole academic experience.

Genre-based Approaches to Literacy Development

The emergence of genre-based approaches to academic literacy instruction has given us added reason and pedagogical tools to look at and teach texts as socio-cultural artifacts. Academic genres thus become *sine qua non* examples of communities in motion as they, at once, both enable the creation of communities and become their most visible product. As one of the genre-based academic literacy major proponents, Johns (1997) suggests that genres are “complex, evolving abstractions held by individuals within communities or larger cultures who share social and textual experiences” (p. 22). Thus, as they progress in their academic literacy acquisition, Generation 1.5 students need to learn not only to write in genre-specific ways, but also to understand that texts are ever-evolving sociocultural entities which are specific to different knowledge communities within and without the university.

Process and expressivistic approaches are still both philosophically and pedagogically common in college literacy classes. However, their lack of focus on the development of the students’ literacy as participants of a community with specific literate conventions, poses particular problems to Generation 1.5 students. According to Johns (1997) these views of literacy have an “insidious benevolence” which “may not provide adequately for

all students, particularly those who are culturally, socially, or linguistically distant from English academic languages and discourses" (p. 14). By focusing instructional efforts on personal meaning and discovery, process and student-centered approaches stifle students' introduction into academic practices of the higher education. Martin (1985) argues that process and student-centered views "promote a situation in which only the brightest, middle-class monolingual students will benefit" (p. 610, cited in Johns, 1997, p. 14). Genre-based academic literacy approaches, on the other hand, are much more in line with the students' literacy learning needs.

In what way, one might ask, should having students work on specific academic genres such as an empirical report, a textual analysis or an annotated bibliography be more of a priority than helping them develop their voice and personal literacy? In reality, literacy development which focuses on reading and writing within the constraints of an academic community gets at the heart not only of how reading and writing are done, but at the larger sociocultural issues students need to concern themselves with in the process. According to Swales (1990), genres (1) help articulate what is common in the past and present of a field; (2) are generated by and generate discourse communities; (3) fulfill communicative and social functions; (4) have a generic nature; and (5) define the goals the academic community is pursuing while at the same time becoming the means by which they are reached. As a whole, the focus on genre seems to facilitate a more realistic literacy development at which students need to persist if they are to become a part of and graduate from an institution of higher learning.

Because genres mold and are molded by specific communities in their linguistic and socio-cultural engagement, they become clear evidence of the values that communities

hold. It becomes, therefore, vital that Generation 1.5 students be taught to see the connection between text production and its socio-cultural context. When this is done, students can realize that each text and its context are indeed enmeshed realities, and that to learn to do the first, of necessity, they must understand and be able to navigate the latter.

Teaching Genre as a Community Heuristic

Although academic literacy instruction focused on genre issues has met with success, this approach is not without its critics. After an 18-month ethnographic study of international graduate students' literacy needs, Casanave (1994) concluded that teaching genre as a way of helping students cope with the many academic integration demands has "limited success in terms of being adequate for helping us understand individual writers in specific settings" (p. 88). Although the idea of the students "entering the discourse" has its appeal, she argues, academic literacy efforts need to be focused on "immediate, local, and interactive factors" (p. 83). By focusing on the characteristics of specific genres, the students may do well in the literacy class but may take away little in terms of knowledge they can use in other academic settings to which literacy skills come to bear.

Given the situated nature of all learning (Collins, Brown, Duguid, 1989), it is often hard for students to transfer any learning done in one setting to a different setting to which the same learning applies. The college academic literacy class, like all other classes, occurs in a specific setting, with a specific group of people, in the context of specific assignments. As such, the overall constraints of the literacy class do not naturally provide for the application of the knowledge gained in the class to other classroom settings. However, in order to succeed, students need to develop the ability to respond to

different academic demands using the processes taught in the literacy class. If, however, in the literacy class students learn to write three or four different genres without consideration as to how the principles used in the writing of those papers apply to the writing of papers in other classes, the literacy class only performs part of its function. Zammel and Spack (1998) argue that there are many cultures within the university, and that every classroom "has its unique conventions, concepts, and terms" (p. ix) which can't be addressed by learning a few genres in the literacy classroom.

The foregoing concerns are valid ones. What if a Generation 1.5 student learns how to write a textual analysis for an English class but then has no idea how to approach the writing of a similar paper for a sociology class, or a different paper, for that matter? The main issue, it seems, is not so much whether genre is a good starting point for literacy acquisition, because it is. The question, I believe, is whether the concept of genre can be taught in such a way that it allows for the application of genre-writing knowledge to a variety of settings. For example, should the explicit features of genre be taught to facilitate transfer? Freedman (1993) argues that genre knowledge, as it is understood and applied by mature writers, should be naturally acquired in the academic acculturation process rather than be explicitly taught. On the other hand, Williams and Colomb (1993) contend that conscious learning of genre features, rather than natural, inductive, long-term acquisition of the same features, has been shown to facilitate other learning processes such as the learning of a second language by adults, and should, therefore, be used.

Generation 1.5 students attending college do not have the time to "naturally acquire" academic literacy. As a result, the teaching of a genre-based literacy, while focusing on

the writing of specific genres, should simultaneously, through explicit instruction, focus on the characteristics which all genres share. With the writing of a textual analysis paper, or any other paper, students need to be led to, among others, (1) analyze genres and apply that knowledge to new contexts, (2) revise genre theories, (3) develop strategies for dealing with new literacy tasks, and (4) develop the ability to actively analyze and critique the different roles, texts, and contexts (Johns, 1997). In order for there to be the likelihood that the academic literacy skills taught in the literacy class actually help students succeed generally, those skills need to be "cued, primed, and guided" (Perkins & Salomon, 1989, p. 19) in a way that makes sense in the macro academic context.

Working at a heuristic level, genre-based approaches can and should offer explicit instruction on the rules-of-thumb mature academic writers use. Students need to learn that, no matter what assignment they receive, there are questions they must always ask and general aspects of writing for an academic audience they must always consider. Such questions include: What is the communicative purpose of these assignments? What is my role as the writer? What does my reader expect? What type of content am I to include? What format does my reader expect? and How formal or informal can I be? When students are able to ask and get answers for these questions, they will understand both the cognitive and contextual nature of all writing and will be in a better position to write for a variety of academic audiences with often dramatically different genre expectations.

Explicit Teaching of Community and Textual Conventions

Explicit instruction can play an important role in the academic literacy acquisition of Generation 1.5 students as, in the process, they learn to extend their "linguistic and cultural-historical repertoires" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Through higher-order

thinking activities which include analysis of contexts, reflection, and active participation, students are supported in the process of further developing their biliterate and bicultural literacy repertoire. Explicit academic and cultural teaching, along with textual features, gives students the possibility of using their own socio-cultural experiences as they participate in and explore the conventions of a different community. Gutiérrez & Rogoff (2003) suggest that

> Individuals' background experiences, together with their interests, may prepare them for knowing how to engage in particular forms of language and literacy activities, play their part in testing formats, resolve interpersonal problems according to specific community-organized approaches, and so forth. An important feature of focusing on repertoires is encouraging people to develop dexterity in determining which approach from their repertoire is appropriate under which circumstances. (p. 22)

As one of the smaller classes in which students participate in their first year in college, the literacy class can, indeed, play a pivotal role as a home base in which students can explore the textual and contextual features of academic literacy development

Given my argument in this article, those of us who teach literacy classes may feel burdened. While colleagues in subject-matter classes teach their content with little or no concern for what happens in other classes outside their department, we are being asked to help our students negotiate the whole of the academic community insofar as it is related to the acquisition of the broad concept of academic literacy. Are we really to teach literacy as a service course?

Discussing her experience in second language (L2) literacy courses, Leki (2002) says,

> I understand and sympathize with, and have, for the sake of academic politics, publicly supported the argument that L2 writing courses are not service courses. But, in fact, I have always thought of my work as a form of service, though service to the students rather than to the institution. I think of it as advocacy, almost as a form of social work. (p. 59)

Literacy teachers and their literacy classes can, indeed, render an important service to the students as they help and guide them "through the mystifying labyrinth of academic discourse" (Belcher and Braine, 1994, p. xv). Without direct contact with faculty members and, often without a powerful social network, students end up managing as best as they can but often not very well.

Although the development of postsecondary academic literacy is a developmental process that will continue throughout the students' academic experience, the literacy class can start the students off on a methodologically straight path of involvement and inquiry. As we ponder what is reasonable or possible, we would do well to consider Leki's (2002) "liberating realization" as she contemplated her literacy course's possibilities and limitations:

> My students [will] not learn to write in English once and for all *in my class*. . . . My classes [can] help them with some aspects of their task, [can] provide some positive experiences with writing, but their long-term success with writing [is] not about my teaching and not about my class. It is always about their lives and learning. And their learning, including learning language and learning to write, will take place in a variety of settings, not just in my class, and over time, not just in the two or three semesters institutionally designated as sufficient." (Leki, 2002, p. 55)

Given, among others, the time limitations of literacy classes for teaching content that will not be "learned" by the end of the semester, we can ask what it is, then, we *can* do.

Within the Realm of Possibility: A Teacher's Role

Teaching academic literacy to Generation 1.5 students and other English-learning students can, if we let it, be an ongoing process of reassessing our constructs. Even some of the most prominent teachers and authors in the field of L2 writing (Silva, 2002; Leki, 2002; Reid, 2002) admit to their sense of inadequacy when they first started teaching, having had little or no pedagogical expertise or education in the teaching of L2 writing. Given different student bodies from the ones teachers have taught in the past, teachers have to reconsider their assumptions of L2 literacy instruction. After many years of practice teaching L2 in North America and abroad, Kroll (2002) says,

> The fact is that the ESL students I now deal with are primarily immigrants, students who have completed a majority of their education in the United States. . . . So, even though I might have thought I had gotten my belief system in order and assembled a repertoire of workable practices, this is a whole different population that I must now learn to work with in ways I have yet not mastered. (p.33).

In order to effectively address the postsecondary academic literacy needs of Generation 1.5 students, institutions as well as teachers and administrators must change some of their own "repertoires of practice."

The Academic Senate for California's Public Colleges and Universities, for example, has made broad suggestions for what can be done in the K-16 educational system to support the literacy development of Generation 1.5 and other language minority students.

It is, however, at the level of each literacy class theirs and others' suggestions can be enacted to make the further development of students' academic literacy viable.

If the literacy class is to play an important role in the academic lives of these students, teachers need to be aware and possibly revisit their own assumptions regarding language minority students and their needs and potential. It is hard to effectively teach those we neither know nor understand. The cultural and linguistic differences between English-learning students and mainstream students and teachers have an impact on the students' performance. However, according to Smith-Davis (2004), it is the lack of knowledge and understanding those working with these students have of their past experiences and background which most hinders these students' academic development. "How can a teacher proceed with minimal cultural background information on which to base action?" ask Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003, p. 23). In a study in which they looked at the impact of background knowledge on student success, Wenger, Lubbes, and Lazo (2004) found that English-teaching paraprofessionals working with English-learning students had great success because they knew the students, their backgrounds, and their communities.

Several authors concur that English-learning students hold part of the answer to our questions of how to best teach them academic literacy. Teachers can discover what students' assumptions about writing and writing instruction are and, on that basis, know how they are bound to affect the students' performance in the class (Reid, 2002). As the main stakeholders in their teachers' teaching life (Kroll, 2002), students can tell us a lot about themselves, their past personal and academic experiences, their apprehensions and their overall needs. A needs analysis is always in order at the beginning of any course of instruction. Nowhere is that more true than in a literacy class with Generation 1.5

students. Gutiérrez and Rogoff (2003) invite teachers to “avoid generalizations based on research and use labels only as ‘narrative descriptors of the participants’ background’ . . . [and to] ground cultural observations in the historical, dynamic processes of communities” (p. 23). Kroll concludes, “We teachers spend a lot of our professional lives talking *about* students, mostly to other teachers, and of course, talking *to* them, but we need to spend more time talking *with* them” (Kroll, 2002, p. 21).

Once teachers have obtained descriptive and accurate information about their students, they will be, then, in a position to explicitly teach the linguistic, cultural and social principles of academic literacy. These principles, based on shared language, texts, and values among members of the academic community, include the knowledge that: (1) texts need to be explicit; (2) topics must be fore grounded in the introduction to the texts; (3) writers have the responsibility to guide the reader through the text with “signposts” or “maps”; (4) language used must create a certain distance between the reader and the writer so as to give it a feel of objectivity; (5) text voice and register need to portray a certain sense of detachment; (6) writers need to be guarded in their presentation of arguments and results; (7) the vision a text proposes must be shared by members of the discourse community; (8) the role the writer plays in both the texts and the academic context must be made clear; (9) intertextuality is both expected and required in the production of new texts; and (10) genre assumptions must be met (Johns, 1997; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).

Explicit teaching ought to focus on genre and community conventions. Adger (1996) suggests that “without continuous, explicit attention to how these students’ language skills, cultural backgrounds, and experiences uniquely shape the school’s work” (p. 1),

we won't be able to help them. However, literacy teachers can and should go beyond genre and community convention in their teaching. Some teachers have discussed some of the types of information they negotiate explicitly with their students. This information includes issues of audience, purpose, and appeals (Silva, 2002); grammar and rhetorical options (Reid, 2002); goal-setting, time management, and role skills (Preto-Bay, 2002), and text conventions (Hamayan, 1994) among others. Such explicit attention to a variety of aspects of literacy development increases the chance that students will have enough ownership of the whole literacy development entails that they will be more likely to apply it appropriately in other academic settings.

In order for students to apply these literacy skills in other contexts, instruction needs to look outwardly and also focus on the mature strategies and role skills necessary to perform literate tasks successfully. Such measures require focused attention on the students' characteristics and needs in such a way that the literacy class itself may have to be reconsidered as a whole. The literacy classes, therefore, can be structured to facilitate successful and appropriate academic and cultural performance in the literacy class itself and in other contexts. To that end, students need to also be explicitly taught a variety of skills and cognitive principles which give them a chance to learn and adjust to the academic community's linguistic and literate conventions in a strategic and knowledgeable way. In line with Robison's (1992) description of the characteristics of academic community, the skills students need to learn may need to include goal setting, planning, time management, personal responsibility and initiative, as well as problem-solving strategies such as asking questions or visiting a teacher during office hours.

College and University personnel often suggest that English-learning students such as Generation 1.5 take courses such as Strategies for Success or Student Development 101, which are designed to help students keep up with their school work and self-regulate. The sparse research conducted on the effectiveness of such courses, however, has failed to show that students do indeed benefit from them. Due, again, to the situated nature of all learning (Brown, Collin, & Duguid, 1989), students have a difficult time transferring the knowledge acquired and applying it to other contexts. Instead, students take these classes as any other class and fail to transfer the principles learned to other contexts. For this reason, Gaskins (1994) suggests that "a program of mediated strategy instruction embedded in the regular curriculum seems an excellent way of guiding students to become learners, thinkers, and problem solvers" (p. 13).

If the literacy class helps students see themselves and participate as *de facto* members of the academic community, they will gain an understanding which can serve them throughout their academic experience. Otherwise,

> Without 'buy-in,' a student may behave—that is, perform the change on cue—but she or he will not become. . . . But if students are aware of the stages of change, and they know these stages are normal and transient, they can share their feelings, write about them, and see the end of the proverbial tunnel. (Reid, 2002, p. 96)

It is this "buy-in" which both students and teachers need. On one hand, students need to become active and informed participants in their own literacy development; on the other hand, teachers need to be allowed to craft solutions which they, themselves, have devised in the context of their class and their students' background and needs. According to Weiss (1995), only if and when teachers are allowed and expected to find local solutions

to local issues will change take place from within, which will increase teacher commitment and bring about change.

Closing Thoughts

The development of college-level academic literacy can be a frustrating experience for Generation 1.5 students. In a new community with new linguistic and academic conventions, successful participation often eludes students, particularly in their first few semesters. Many drop out before they have had a chance to truly start the process: without a family history of academic participation, strong social networks in post-secondary education, and lack of confidence in their ability to succeed, these students' college participation can be fraught with mismatched expectations and disappointment. As Maloney (2003) has suggested, "If . . . students are held to high standards, directly taught strategies for accomplishing good work within academic conventions, informed of the demands of the institution, and treated as colleagues in the shared adventure of learning, they can participate fully and successfully in the intellectual life of college" (p. 1).

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