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## Exploring notions of genre in 'academic literacies' and 'writing across the curriculum': approaches across countries and contexts

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## 20 Exploring Notions of Genre in “Academic Literacies” and “Writing Across the Curriculum”: Approaches Across Countries and Contexts

**David R. Russell**

**Mary Lea**

**Jan Parker**

**Brian Street**

**Tiane Donahue**

The SIGET IV panel on genre in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and “academic literacies” (ACLITS) has set rolling a discussion of the similarities and differences in the two traditions, the former originating in the US in the early 1970s, the latter originating in England in the early 1990s. This paper maps out some elements of each in relation to the other and to genre, which we hope will set in motion further discussions and cross-fertilization.

At first glance, the two seem very different. As their respective titles suggest, one is about writing and the other about literacies. The term WAC means efforts to improve students’ learning and writing (or learning through writing) in all university courses and departments (with some attention to school and adult education as well). The term “writing in the disciplines” (WID) is also used, somewhat synonymously, but suggests greater attention to the relation between writing and learning in a specific discipline. (For an overview and bibliography on WAC, see Bazerman, Joseph, Bethel, Chavkin, Fouquette, & Garufis, 2005.)

ACLITS is about *literacies* in higher education, primarily. In the UK, literacy has been more traditionally associated with school and adult learning, rather than the university. Indeed, there is still a strongly held belief amongst most UK university teachers that literacy needs to be attended to before students embark upon higher education studies (a view that is shared by many—perhaps most—US university teachers). ACLITS is working to change that view of literacy by taking social practices approaches to multiple and plural literacies, often associated with “New Literacy Studies” (Street, 1996).

WAC is twenty years older, and much larger and sprawling, encompassing many—and, often, dissenting—voices within it. Some 2400 articles and books

on WAC have been published since 1975, with some 240 empirical studies. ACLITS is much younger, relatively smaller, and more focused and coherent. Though the object of both is similar—academic writing—the purposes are different. WAC is primarily a pedagogical reform movement. Despite being practitioner led, ACLITS has focused on research and theory thus far, describing practices and understanding them theoretically. It is just entering into large-scale pedagogy and reform efforts.

At first glance at least, the two also appear to come from rather different intellectual worlds. WAC comes out of US “rhetoric and composition,” a field that arose out of the professionalization of teachers of first-year university general writing courses in the 1970s—with very much a humanities bent—and located in English departments primarily, with relatively little contact with linguistics. ACLITS comes primarily out of studies in language, literacy and ethnography, with a focus on descriptive studies of specific literacy practices, and has no particular disciplinary home.

These differences are magnified by the very different systems of higher education they inhabit. The US system emphasizes late specialization, with a period of “general education” in the first two years of university, and writing in several disciplines. In the UK students have tended to specialize early and write for one discipline, although recently “modular” courses have involved more “mix” of disciplines and therefore more switching of written genres (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). In the UK assessments of students almost always involve extensive written work, whereas in the US assessments are often multiple choice. The primary difference is that the US has a ubiquitous, required general writing course in higher education, first-year composition, which deeply colors the whole enterprise of WAC.

Yet there are important similarities. Both ACLITS and WAC took their impetus from widening participation, as it is called in the UK, or admission of previously excluded groups in the US. The US has for decades had a system of mass education, whereas the UK is really only beginning “massification.” So both WAC (in the 1970s) and ACLITS (in the 1990s) began as a response to an influx of new students.

Ideologically both are oppositional, attempting to reform higher education and make it more open. And both use writing/literacy to resist deeply entrenched attitudes about writing, and about students and disciplines. Both attempt to move beyond elementary skills (and thus remedial or deficit) models of writing to consider the complexity of communication in relation to learning.

And in terms of research, there is a strong element of ethnographic research in North America, that owes much to Dell Hymes and Shirley Brice Heath and that complements British traditions of anthropology and applied linguistics (see

Heath & Street, 2008). And ACLITS has from the beginning been influenced by North American WAC research by Bazerman, Bartholomae (1986), Russell and others.

And in the last 10 years, North American WAC programs have begun to speak of themselves in terms of multi-modal “communication across the curriculum” (CAC), in part a response to the New London Group and its interest in new media, which was also influential for ACLITS.

We organize this paper around parallel descriptions of each tradition under the headings historical origins, institutional positions, theory and research about genre, and finally pedagogy using genre. We conclude by drawing out a number of comparisons between the two for further dialog.

## **HISTORICAL ROOTS**

### ***ACLITS Origins***

The notion of “academic literacies” has its roots in a body of practice-based research and literacy theory that became significant in the UK during the 1990s. Until this time little attention had been paid to issues of student writing, the general assumption—although rarely articulated—being that students would learn how to write through their tacit acculturation into the norms and conventions of single subject disciplinary frames (Ivanic & Lea, 2006). Hounsell (1988) had previously looked at problems students encountered when confronted with the unfamiliar discourses of the university. He identified academic discourse as “a particular kind of written world, with a set of conventions, or ‘code,’ of its own.” He illustrated how students needed to be sensitive to different disciplinary ways of framing in their writing, and highlighted the tacit nature of academic discourse calling for its features to be made more explicit to students. (See also the Australian research of Ballard & Clanchy, 1988.) This focus on explicit acculturation into disciplinary codes and discourses shared much in common with the earlier work of Bizzell (1982) and Bartholomae (1986) in the US, which as we will see, grew out of the US WAC movement that began in the 1970s.

By the early 1990s, UK higher education was experiencing a fundamental change with unprecedented expansion in the sector and the consequences of the 1992 Education Act, which abolished the binary divide between polytechnics and universities, bringing them together for both administrative and funding purposes under one government funded body. In practical terms this meant increasing numbers of students and class sizes with no concomitant expansion in resources. One response was the creation of “study skills” and “learning support” centers, where students were able to receive one-on-one or small group support which their lecturers were no longer in a position to pro-

vide. It was among those practitioners working with students in such centers that the early roots of the field of academic literacies research began to emerge (much as in the US in the 1970s, the work of Mina Shaughnessey grew out of work with students identified as under-prepared and began serious interest in writing development). Increasingly frustrated with the limitations of simplistic surface- and skills-based models of student writing in their work with students, they began to look both for more workable and theorized explanations of the problems being encountered by student writers. As practitioner-researchers, they found themselves at the interface between theory and practice and their early publications often reflected this intersection (Ivanic 1998; Jones, Turner, & Street, 1999; Lea, 1994; Lea & Street, 1998, 1999; Lea & Stierer, 1999; Lillis, 1999, 2001).

The dearth of literature on student writing coming out of the UK at that time meant that these researcher/practitioners often looked to the US for theoretical framing for their work. Particularly influential was Bazerman's early work (1988). Although his concern had been with the texts produced by established academic writers, UK researchers found this a particularly useful framing with which to think about undergraduate student writing. In particular his claim that writing matters because the different choices around what and how we write results in different meanings, underpinned the framing for both research and practice with student writers. With the expansion of higher education and increasing numbers of adult students entering UK universities as "non-traditional" entrants in the early 1990s, Bazerman's analysis provided a fruitful way of exploring how these students brought their own knowledge and experience to the construction of the writing they were required to undertake for assessment (Lea, 1998). Examining the object under study, the literature of the field, the anticipated audience and the author's own self in the writing of mature students laid bare the ways in which engaging with academic knowledge could conflict with other more familiar "ways of knowing." For Ivanic and her colleagues at Lancaster University (Clark & Ivanic, 1991) adopting principles of critical language awareness provided a further theoretical orientation from which to view so called problems with student writing.

This backdrop provided a foundation for the contested approach which has become associated with academic literacies research during the last decade, examining in detail students' struggles with meaning making and the nature of power and authority in student writing (Ivanic, 1998; Lea, 1994; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 1997). In part this was influenced by related developments in critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1989). Work on critical language awareness in schools (Fairclough, 1992) seemed particularly pertinent to the new higher education context. In 1996 Street published an innovative chapter on academic

literacies which both challenged academic convention (by incorporating the original texts of others rather than integrating them into his own work with conventional referencing) and foregrounded questions of “academic literacies.” The perspective taken by Street (1996) in this publication sat within a body of work that had become known as the “New Literacy Studies” (NLS). Street’s seminal contribution to NLS had been made earlier when he distinguished between autonomous and ideological models of literacy (Street, 1984). He had argued that whereas an autonomous model of literacy suggests that literacy is a decontextualised skill, which once learned can be transferred with ease from one context to another, the ideological model highlights the contextual and social nature of literacy practices, and the relationships of power and authority which are implicit in any literacy event. Literacy, then, is not something that once acquired can be effortlessly applied to any context requiring mastery of the written word. Writing and reading practices are deeply social activities; familiarity with and understanding these practices takes place in specific social contexts, which are overlaid with ideological complexities, for example, with regard to the different values placed on particular genres of written texts. Following this perspective, NLS, with its roots in sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, conceptualizes writing and reading as contextualized social practices.

Until the mid-1990s New Literacy Studies had been concerned with school-based, community and work-place literacies, primarily of people in different cultural contexts, notably Iran, South Africa, and Latin America (Street, 2001) but had not paid any attention to literacies in the university “at home.” Although the early work of, for example Lea (1994) and Lillis (1997), had conceptualized writing as contextualized social practice explicitly challenging deficit models of writing, neither at that time situated their work explicitly in the NLS tradition nor made reference to “academic literacies,” as such. However, Lea (1994) did illustrate the multiplicity of discourses in the academy, an important distinction from the use of the term discourse in the singular. Ivanic also foregrounded the use of different and competing discourses in her study of mature students (Ivanic, 1998). Overall, what characterized this emerging body of work was its specific focus on student writing as social practice and recognition of the multiplicity of practices, whether these were conceptualized as discourses or literacies. The use of the term “literacies,” rather than “discourses” (the framing more commonly provided by the US writers in the college composition field), gradually became more prevalent in the UK literature. This was not merely because of its association with a theoretical framing provided by the NLS, but because the focus of concern was student writing, rather than spoken language; the term discourse being associated more commonly with the use of spoken rather than written language at that time.

Research by Lea and Street (1998), building on the NLS methodological approach but also on Lea's practitioner experience, introduced new theoretical frames to a field which was, at the time, still predominantly influenced by psychological accounts of student learning (e.g., Gibbs, 1994). Rather than frame their work in terms of "good" and "poor" writing, Lea and Street suggested that any explanation needed to examine faculty and student expectations around writing without making any judgments about which practices were appropriate. Drawing on the findings from an empirical research project conducted in two very different universities, they examined student writing against a background of institutional practices, power relations and identities, with meanings being contested between faculty and students, and an emphasis on the different understandings and interpretations of the writing task. Findings from their research suggested fundamental gaps between students' and faculty understandings of the requirements of student writing, providing evidence at the level of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge, rather than at the level of technical skill, surface linguistic competence and cultural assimilation. Based on their analysis of their research data, they explicated three models of student writing. These they termed study skills, socialization, and academic literacies. The study skills model is based on the assumption that mastery of the correct rules of grammar and syntax, coupled with attention to punctuation and spelling, will ensure student competence in academic writing; it is, therefore, primarily concerned with the surface features of text. In contrast the academic socialization model assumes students need to be acculturated into the discourses and genres of particular disciplines and that making the features and requirements of these explicit to students will result in their becoming successful writers. In some respects the third model, academic literacies, subsumes many of the features of the other two; Lea and Street (1998) point out that the models are not presented as mutually exclusive. Nevertheless they argue that it is the academic literacies model which is best able to take account of the nature of student writing in relation to institutional practices, power relations and identities, in short to consider the complexity of meaning making which the other two models fail to provide.

The explication of the three models proposed by Lea and Street has been drawn upon very widely in the literature on teaching and learning across a range of HE contexts (see, e.g., Thesen & van Pletzen, 2006, on South Africa) and calls for a more in-depth understanding of student writing and its relationship to learning across the academy, thus offering an alternative to deficit models of learning and writing based on autonomous models of literacy.

## **WAC Origins**

The WAC movement's origin in the US in the 1970s can only be understood in light of the century-old US tradition of university-level "composition" courses, required of almost all first year university students. These courses were taught in English departments and traditionally mixed the teaching of literary texts with skills-based instruction in writing, often with a remedial stigma attached (deficit model). In the late 1970s, composition teachers professionalized the teaching of writing, developing their own MA and PhD programs in rhetoric and composition (that is, the teaching of university-level writing). They developed several strands of research drawn from both the humanities (i.e., classical rhetoric) and the social sciences (e.g., education), and pushed composition teaching beyond literary analysis and "skills and drills."

As with ACLITS in the 1990s, the rise of the WAC movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Russell, 1991) was a response to the influx into higher education of previously excluded groups, through open admissions policies in public institutions. One response was to radically rethink the remedial or deficit model of writing and found writing centers, special curricula, and systematic research into the differences between student and teacher perceptions of error—much as with ACLITS research in the mid-1990s. Another approach was to enlist teachers from other disciplines to improve students' writing—and learning: the WAC movement.

The early theoretical inspiration for the WAC movement in the US came directly from a British educational theorist and reformer, James Britton, and his colleagues at the University of London Institute of Education, who coined the term WAC (Russell, 1991) as part of their efforts to improve writing in the disciplines in secondary education. Britton and his colleagues (1975) viewed writing (and talk) as a gradually developing accomplishment, thoroughly bound up with the particular intellectual goals and traditions of each discipline or profession, not as a single set of readily-generalizable skills learned once and for all. They also theorized writing in terms of disciplinary learning and personal development, not discrete, generalizable skills. And they used Vygotsky (among others) to theorize it. In Britain, the Language across the Curriculum or Language Awareness movements (as they were called) did not last long or have a great impact on secondary schools, and almost none in HE at the time (although see Ivanic, 2004, for more recent attention to Critical Language Awareness), but their ideas were picked up by the fledgling WAC movement in the US—mainly in higher education.

In the early 1980s, the dominant model of writing research was cognitive. But by the mid-1980s, a few US researchers began to use ethnographic methods to explore writing development as a cultural-historical phenomenon. As with the ACLITS in the late 1990s, the Ethnography of Communication was the inspiration. The seminal article was by Lucille McCarthy, a PhD student of Dell



Hymes. Her 1987 article “Strangers in Strange Lands” followed one student as he went to courses in four disciplines, and as the title suggests, McCarthy found that the differences in disciplinary writing practices and communities were much more important to the student than the similarities, a theme pursued by Lea and Street (1998) in their account of UK students’ switching between courses in modular degrees.

Classroom practice in general composition courses began to change as well in the 1980s. “WAC textbooks” in first-year composition courses began to appear, which taught the genres of writing in the social and natural sciences—not as formulas to be followed, ordinarily, but as indices of the ways of knowing, the epistemology and social actions, of knowledge domains or disciplines.

Research into social dimensions of the disciplines and professions—how and why professionals write—complemented textual research. A large strand of research into the genres of professional and academic research writing began (e.g., Bazerman, 1988; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Some compared student writing to that of professionals. For example, Geisler’s (1994) work on expert and student texts in philosophy, *Academic Literacy and the Nature of Expertise*, exposed philosophers’ ways of writing, thinking, and being, in relation to the discursive moves of students writing in philosophy courses. And an educational reform movement swept US HE.

## INSTITUTIONAL POSITIONS

### *WAC Institutionally*

Institutionally, WAC has been focused in programs within individual universities (and some secondary schools). It is a higher education reform movement, but without a centralized national organization, though it does have a loosely organized special interest group associated with the professional organization for composition, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Despite this, it has had wide influence in HE over the last 30 years. Perhaps one third of US institutions have some WAC program, in a vast number of forms (McLeod, 1992). Many WAC programs also include some curricular structure(s) to provide continuity. Institutions or departments often designate certain courses as “writing intensive” or “writing extensive” and require students to take certain ones (or a certain number of them) to graduate. Other universities have “linked” courses in which some or all of the students in a course in a discipline take a parallel course in writing, which uses the content of the disciplinary course and is planned in conjunction with it. More rarely, departments organize a sequence of writing tasks and student support that extends throughout their

curriculum, from first year to last, to consciously develop students' writing (and often other communication modes). Some universities have required all departments to develop such a sequence. All these curricular forms are almost always in addition to first-year composition courses, though some universities require freshman "seminars" instead: a first-year writing course taught by staff in various disciplines with subjects for writing drawn from their disciplines (Monroe, 2006).

Almost all WAC programs include organized efforts to develop awareness of writing among teachers in the disciplines and their competence in supporting students in their writing. Many institutions have interdisciplinary workshops and seminars for academic teaching staff from all disciplines on writing development. There they not only discuss the particular needs and resources for their students' writing but also how writing works differently in each of their disciplines, how it brings students to deeper involvement with the unique ways of knowing in each—the epistemology of each—and how students can be helped to write to learn as they learn to write in a field (in Britton's famous phrase, now a slogan). Teaching staff learn to design and sequence assignments, communicate expectations, and give feedback. And since 1993 there has been a biennial national (now international) conference that draws about 500 faculty members from a great range of disciplines, institutions and countries.

Finally, WAC programs are often connected with or part of a writing center or centers (often attached to a student support unit). Tutors (graduate or undergraduate students, typically) give individual or small group help to students. Sometimes tutors are drawn from various disciplines. Sometimes there are discipline-specific writing centers. And sometimes there are tutors assigned to specific courses (usually large lectures) to help students with their writing and learning. These centers have tried to avoid the remedial or deficit model of writing by helping all students with their writing—and, in some centers, even teaching staff who are writing research articles.

All of these efforts struggle with a range of institutional attitudes and structures that militate against WAC: reductive and remedial concepts of student writing (particularly that writing is a set of general skills to be mastered in the ubiquitous first-year general writing courses), demands on faculty time for research, large enrollments in many courses, and so on (Walvoord, 1997). After 30 years, it is still an uphill battle, but because so many academics in the US have been exposed to the idea of WAC—through attending workshops or teaching writing-intensive courses, for example—WAC has become part of the institutional landscape of higher education in the US.

### ***ACLITS Institutionally***

In the UK, "writing-intensive" (though not writing conscious) undergradu-

ate courses were traditionally the preserve of Oxford and Cambridge, where teaching was based on individual teaching by faculty members supervising student writing, or as it was perceived, student disciplinary learning, in weekly one-on-one sessions. The post-1992 expansion, entailing large class sizes and an increasingly diverse student body, and the growth of themed, interdisciplinary modular curricula resulted in more attention to writing as meaning making and as a social practice. This has led to movements such as Writing Development in Higher Education (biennial conferences since 1995) and more recently the WAC-influenced Thinking Writing project and new, US style, writing centers (for these and other examples see Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006).

ACLITS has influenced all of these efforts. However, as illustrated above, ACLITS, although primarily practitioner led, has tended to be more focused on theory and research. Indeed there have been questions raised in the literature about the value of the framing offered by academic literacies research for pedagogy. Lillis (2006) suggests that we need to develop an academic literacies pedagogy which places the nature of dialogue at its centre and that more specifically we should be thinking about how we can develop and validate alternative spaces for writing and meaning making in the academy. Lea (2004) suggests that the principles emerging from academic literacies research can be taken up in different institutional contexts. She illustrates this through a case study of a postgraduate course in teacher education delivered online.

From a practitioner perspective the provision of support based on any particular set of principles is unusual. Nevertheless, many practitioners do draw on the general framing offered by the academic literacies perspective, albeit not explicitly. The biennial Writing Development in Higher Education conference draws together those working across settings in the field of writing support, who are adopting a social practice model of writing. A number of institutions have pursued programs for supporting students and their teachers, often in relation to widening participation. These developments are frequently initiated by educational development units and supported by some form of student learning center. Although both these generally have a broad brief of which writing is only a part, taken together they are generally the most important institutional sites for writing development in the UK. While educational development units work directly supporting faculty with issues of teaching and learning, including student writing, the brief of most student learning centers is to work only with students. Coupled with the fact that the latter is often low status, hourly paid work and the academic credibility of the former is continually under threat as universities are increasingly reluctant to employ educational developers on academic contracts, the kinds of approaches suggested by Lillis and Lea are few and far between.

## THEORY AND RESEARCH: THE ROLES OF GENRE

### *ACLITS Theory and Research Using Genre*

Issues of genre are central to the three models of student writing outlined above (skills, socialization, and academic literacies). Each of these models is implicitly associated with a different orientation to the notion of genre. In terms of study skills, genre would be conceptualized primarily in relation to surface features and form; academic socialization would be associated with the conceptualization of genre in terms of established disciplinary norms for communication, given primarily by the texts written by academics within a disciplinary community. The empirically grounded academic literacies perspective is aligned with a view of genre as social practice rather than genre knowledge in terms of disciplinary communication per se, although this is by its very nature central to the social practice perspective.

Research in the field has uncovered the range of genres engaged in by students across the university, with variation evident not just in terms of the discipline or specific departmental or module requirements for student writers. For example, genre variation is evident in terms of the individual predispositions of individual university teachers and in relation to specific assignments (Lea & Street, 1998; see also Lea & Street, 1999, 2006). The contribution of the theoretical and methodological framing offered by social anthropology and applied linguistics is central to this understanding of genre types as they emerge in the detailed everyday encounters around writing in particular institutional contexts. Much of the research has been undertaken through an ethnographic lens which provides the opportunity to make the familiar strange, to approach everyday practices around student writing as an area of study without bringing to this judgments about the nature of that writing (see Heath & Street, 2008). Through such a lens a range of genres become visible and opened up for scrutiny, not just those that are given by either generic academic writing requirements or by the discipline. For example, researchers have examined feedback on students' written work and the implications for meaning making and issues of identity (Ivanic, 1998, 2004; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Stierer (1997, 2000) has examined the nature of assignment questions for master's level students and the implications of the ways in which these are framed for students' understanding of assignment questions. Lea (2006) has explored the textual nature of online student debates and how students integrate these into their assignments. Street and colleagues have explored the issue of "genre switching" amongst pre-university students being prepared for university entry in Widening Participation courses at King's College London (Scalone & Street, 2006; Lea & Street, 2006—see below).

The findings of the type of detailed research signaled above suggests, then,

that genre questions arise in consideration of the range of texts and practices which are integral to any understanding of student writing—and how best to support it—rather than being merely concerned with disciplinary considerations, such as “how to write in History,” “how to reference in Psychology,” “how to develop an argument in English.”

As we have already discussed above ACLITS has tended to focus on unpacking micro-social practices, such as “gaps” between student and lecturer perceptions of particular writing activities, often embedded deeply in traditions of essayist literacy and the assessment of writing. Researchers in this tradition have also focused on theorizing and researching new genres of writing in HE teaching, in different modes and media (see below) and on the ways in which students are called upon—often implicitly—to switch between different genres and modes (which also raises the more general issue of how genre and mode are theorized in relation to other traditions of genre analysis and multimodal studies). Arguably what distinguishes academic literacies research from WID is its tendency to focus at this micro level and also upon the different interpretations and understandings of genres of the participants in any particular writing encounter in the university. Drawing on the kind of framing provided by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995), genres emerge in the relationship between the creation of texts and their associated practices in any particular context. Not only do they vary across disciplines, subjects and/or fields of study but also in text types (e.g., academic assignments, faculty feedback/marginalia, email).

This approach to genre draws a range of texts and practices into the academic literacies frame, rather than concentrating on student essay writing per se. The focus on the minutiae of texts and practices in understanding meaning making is given by the ethnographic roots of this field, and particularly Hymes’ (1974) ethnography of communication, resulting in the foregrounding of an institutional perspective which takes precedence over a disciplinary or subject based focus. This may indeed be the most important distinction between the different traditions being explored in this chapter, despite their evidently common theoretical and, in part, methodological roots. As the landscape of higher education has changed over the last decade, with increased emphasis on professional rather than purely academic study and concomitant attention to new genres of writing in the academy, the theoretical framing offered by academic literacies research is becoming increasingly valuable in terms of both research and practice. For example, Creme (2008) is concerned with learning journals as transitional genres bridging a gap between students’ personal worlds and the rigorous discipline based genres embedded in more conventional essay writing. (Student journal writing is also a strategy used by the Widening Participation Programme at King’s College London, described below).

A number of practitioner researchers are also underpinning their work in new multimodal environments for learning with principles offered by academic literacies research. Walton & Archer (2004) illustrate the limitations of teaching web searching skills in a South African context, if teachers do not understand the explanations and interpretations that their students are bringing to reading the web. They suggest that students already have to be in command of subject discourses and understand the genres they encounter online in order to make their searching worthwhile; supporting students in using the web in their studies requires sensitivity to the students' background and prior experience. This perspective mirrors that offered by the early findings in the field but has application to online learning. McKenna (2006) examines how students' use of hypertext challenges the linear construction of argument in academic writing. She suggests that this environment offers students the possibility to take up new subject positions not possible in more conventional essayist genres. The focus is less upon disciplinary genre knowledge and more upon issues of subjectivity and agency and the ways in which these both rub up against and challenge and subvert conventional academic genres.

### ***WAC Theory and Research Using Genre***

WAC research has taken two complementary directions: one investigating the writing of professionals in various disciplines and professions; another focused on student writing in the disciplines—especially the role of writing in learning (Russell, 1997). Concepts of genre have been central in theory and research in both. (See Klein, 1999, and Newell, 2006, for reviews of quantitative studies of writing to learn; see Russell, 2001, and Bazerman et al., 2005, for reviews of qualitative studies of student writing in HE).

Some studies have viewed genre in traditional form-based terms, as collections of identifiable features and conventions (e.g., contrastive rhetoric; the genre studies reviewed in Klein, 1999). However, in the past two decades, new ways of thinking about genre in student writing—growing out of the study of the genre and activity of professional writing—emphasize the activity of genre (Bazerman, 1988). This approach is rooted in C. Miller's (1984, 1994) theory of genre as social action. Genres are "typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations" (1984, p. 159). The researcher's focus shifts from the text itself to the relationship between the text and the activity of people in situations where texts are used in regularized—typified—ways. Genres are not merely forms of words, but forms of life, socio-cultural regularities that stabilize-for-now (but never finally) our interactions (Schryer, 1993).

In the late 1980s, the concept of genre as social action was combined with Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory, which sees the relation between

thought and language (and learning and writing) in social as well as cognitive terms. Cultural tools such as speaking and writing mediate our interior thoughts as well as our external social interactions. Genres, as typified ways of interacting with tools, can be seen as ways of coordinating joint activity and regulating thought (Russell, 1997; Bazerman, this volume). For Bazerman and Russell (2003), as the signs on a page mediate between relationships and people, so do genres; texts are “attended to in the context of activities” and can only be studied in their “animating activities”—production, reception, meaning, and value, “embedded in people’s uses and interpretations.”

Quantitative studies of student writing using genre have tended to see genres in the older, form-based way, and to look at their effects in more strictly cognitive rather than social cognitive terms. They focus on the requirements genres pose for searching out and organizing information, structuring relationships among ideas and with audiences, and controlling stance toward content (Bazerman, this volume; Klein, 1999; Newell, 2006). These studies show that students engage in different processes when they have the expectations of one genre rather than another (student newspaper, in-class essay, registrar’s form).

Qualitative studies of student writing have tended to take an activity or social action approach to genre as they describe student writing and students’ writing and learning. In the last dozen years, theories of genre systems (Bazerman, 1994; Russell, 1997) or networks (Prior, this volume) or ecologies (Spinuzzi, 2003), informed by cultural historical activity theory, have been applied to understanding professional work and its relationship to education (e.g., Smart 2006; Winsor 2003). Contexts such as organizations or institutions are viewed as complex activity systems mediated by complex systems of intertextual genres, through which knowledge circulates and activity is mediated in intersubjective networks (Prior, this volume; Russell & Yañez, 2003). Research on genre has traced the relationships between academic writing/activity and the writing/activity of other systems, such as home, professions, hobbies, etc. (e.g., Prior, 1998; Russell & Yañez, 2003), and its effects on both writing and identity. Genre is seen as offering direction or motive to activity, as well pathways to new identities for participants. Indeed, longitudinal studies of students in HE (Beaufort, 2007; Wardle, forthcoming; Sommers, 2004; Donahue, 2008) have described the genres that students acquire as they learn in the disciplines, within various institutional contexts.

## PEDAGOGY AND GENRE

### *WAC and Pedagogy*

WAC pedagogical theory, research, and practice are well developed and

take two basic directions: implicit and explicit. The most common view among teachers in the disciplines (and most WAC experts, very likely) is that students learn to write new genres primarily through writing in authentic contexts, such as their courses in the disciplines. And the focus of the WAC movement is on encouraging writing, feedback (teacher or peer), and revision or repetition. In this view, students learn to write by writing.

A strong theoretical argument for this view has been made by a group of Canadian researchers, and supported with a long series of qualitative studies that fail to show transfer of genre knowledge from academic to workplace contexts (Dias, Freedman, Medway, & Paré, 1999). They theorize that genre knowledge is tacit and only acquired unconsciously as part of some purposeful, communicative activity in the context where the genre is used. Students “pick it up” without being explicitly taught a genre.

There are three well-articulated approaches in North America to explicit teaching, which inform much teaching of writing and, often, WAC as well. The first might be termed “genre acquisition,” teaching in an explicit (though not necessarily presentational) way certain generic “moves” or conventions of genres, derived from analysis of the genres (either textual or contextual or both). This is the most common approach in North American second language teaching (English for Special Purposes/English for Academic Purposes). The goal is to provide linguistic resources that students need. For example, Swales’ analysis of the generic moves of academic research article introductions is taught to L2 graduate students explicitly, along with a good deal of reading and analysis of introductions, structured practice writing them, and so on. This approach has been used rather little in WAC or first language teaching, perhaps because there are fundamental differences between first and second language learners (see Carter, Ferzli, & Weibe, 2004). (A somewhat similar approach, Systemic Functional Linguistics, is even less common in North America.)

A second approach (Devitt, 2004; Bawarshi, 2003) is to teach “genre awareness” as distinct from (but related to) genre acquisition. Students first rhetorically analyze familiar genres whose contexts they have experienced, then move to less or unfamiliar genres that are related to them (antecedent genres, usually), studying both the form and aspects of the context, always trying to “keep form and context intertwined” (Devitt, 2004, p. 198). They then do “genre ethnography” of some context in which the genre is used (see Johns, 2002). Devitt argues that teaching genre awareness, rather than particular skills, will facilitate transfer, as previously learned genres become antecedent genres for further learning and practice of related genres (Devitt, p. 202ff). This approach has been used mainly in general writing courses (first-year composition, technical communication, etc.) where there are students from a variety of disci-



plines and the teacher is not expert in all of them. Students do research in the target context and its genres. The teacher helps them become good researchers into genre. But the teacher does not teach a specific genre to the students.

A third approach, sometimes termed “New Rhetorical,” is to teach a genre explicitly, but in the process of performing a rhetorical action in its target context of use—which is the situation in disciplinary classrooms, typically. In the process of doing some discipline-specific learning activity, students also get explicit instruction in genre. But the instruction is not confined to teaching stages or moves or conventions; it also attempts to teach the logic of communication in terms of the logic of the learning/disciplinary activity—the “why” and “where” and “when” of a genre as well as the “what” and “how” of it. For example, Carter et al. (2004) developed an online tool for teaching the laboratory report genre in science and engineering education. LabWrite leads students through the process of doing and representing (textually, mathematically, and graphically) the laboratory activity as they are doing it. The goal of instruction is not to teach “the genre” or “writing” but to teach scientific concepts and scientific method using genre as a mediational means. The genre is a tool for doing and learning science in the context of the course-specific laboratory. A comparison group study found that students who used LabWrite wrote lab reports that chemistry teachers rated as “significantly more effective” in (1) learning the scientific concept of the lab and (2) learning to apply scientific reasoning. The students also (3) developed a significantly more positive attitude toward writing lab reports than the comparison group. This is the only comparison group study to show explicit instruction effective in teaching a genre to L1 adults.

The second question—genre’s relationship to writing to learn—has been explored empirically primarily with younger students. Efforts to substantiate the claim that the act of writing per se improves learning were not successful. Instead, research found that the kinds (or genres) of writing students do and the conditions in which they do it matter a great deal. Cooper and MacDonald (1992) found that university literature students who kept academic journals structured by discipline-specific questions did better on exams than students who kept unstructured personal journals on their reading. Indeed, the largest literature review to date of controlled comparison studies of writing to learn, Klein (1999), found that the most effective approaches were those based on genre, but the studies are few and still inconclusive. Klein describes the theory of how genre supports learning thus: “writers use genre structures to organize relationships among elements of text, and thereby among elements of knowledge” (p. 203).

However, as noted above, these quantitative studies of student writing using genre have tended to see genres in the older, form-based way, and to look at their effects in more strictly cognitive rather than social cognitive terms. They

look at study questions, journals, and essays, not discipline-specific tasks. And as Bazerman (this volume) points out, “The effects seem to be associated with the specific nature of tasks, with study questions leading to increased recall and essays associated with connecting ideas (see also Newell, 2006; McCutcheon, 2007). This pattern, as Bazerman points out, is reminiscent of Scribner and Cole’s (1981) finding that the “cognitive effects of literacy were varied and tied to the institutionally embedded practices which literacy was used for.” Bazerman goes on to theorize that Vygotsky’s (1978, 1986) concept that learning precedes development may explain the way genre may facilitate the development of higher-level discipline-specific ways of knowing, as well as low-level task-specific knowledge (this volume).

Finally, critical pedagogy has also influenced WAC on genre. Beginning with Mahala (1991), some teachers and theorists have called for WAC to embrace the wider critical pedagogy movement, in various ways (see Bazerman et al., 2005 for a summary). One line of critique and reform calls WID “assimilationist” and emphasizes the importance of valuing students’ non-academic language and genres, especially those drawn from ethnic or class backgrounds, which academic genres often exclude (Delpit, 1993; Villanueva, 2001; McCrary, 2001).

Another line of critique and reform emphasizes students’ individual voice, and questions whether academic discourse in the disciplines provides students with the authority and stance they need to preserve and express a personal voice, to assert their authority over the disciplinary genres—and to resist simply reproducing the dominant ideologies of the disciplines (Mahala, 1991; Halasek, 1999; LeCourt, 1996). These arguments often call for students to write personal or non-academic genres in the disciplinary classrooms. Elbow (1998) even argues that students best develop an intellectual stance for writing academic discourse by writing non-academic genres. And in a broader sense, Malinowtz’s (1998) feminist critique argues that WID should challenge the established boundaries of disciplines and genres of academic writing, as third wave feminism has done.

Responses to these critiques emphasize (1) that the very power of the disciplines makes it important to understand them—and understanding is a necessary precondition to intelligently critiquing and/or resisting them, (2) that learning new ways of thinking and acting can enrich and expand one’s identity, and (3) that critiques of the disciplines from the point of view of the humanities prejudice what students will find most valuable for their ethical and personal development (Bazerman, 1992, 2002). McLeod and Maimon (2000) argue that WAC itself is “quietly subversive” as it resists the banking (transmission) model of education and encourages teachers to make students active and critical learners rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Finally, disciplines themselves are not monolithic and each contains critical elements with it, with which WAC can and does engage.

There is then lively theoretical debate and much pedagogical experimentation and research on genre in WAC pedagogy, and discussions of pedagogy and genre between ACLITS and WAC approaches seem a fertile ground for producing new strains of pedagogical thought and action.

### ***ACLITS and Pedagogy***

Although the development of a pedagogic dimension of academic literacies is still in its infancy, increasing attention is being paid to the pedagogical significance of the specific application of theory and research on academic literacies, in which genre is an explicit pedagogical consideration.

Indeed, the seminal work of the ACLITS researchers referred to above has brought some very basic issues—of academic identity, of the status of academic knowledge, of whether and which genres of academic writing should be distinguished and valued—into the wider pedagogical debate.

One such debate is over assessment practices and their effect on learning. In researching and questioning feedback practices and the setting and implementation of marking (grading) criteria, ACLITS has highlighted some interesting preconceptions and hidden agendas. Shay (forthcoming) suggests that seeing assessment as a social practice has masked deep disciplinary and sub-disciplinary divisions between ideas of whether knowledges, knowledge-making practices or disciplinary “insiderdom” are being judged. Several projects reported at the European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing 2007 (e.g., Wigglesworth & McKeever on “Developing Academic Literacy in Context,” and Coffin et al. on “Genre-based pedagogy for discipline-specific purposes”) reported that teachers’ attempts to make assessment criteria more explicit had concealed rather than revealed assessment practices. An ACLITS approach revealed the concealment, but more clearly needs to be done to change pedagogic practice.

Two basic premises about ACLITS research, however, are that we need to be concerned with all the texts in the academy, not just student writing, and that focus on student writing alone has masked the need to focus on the range of genres (in various and intertwined media), not just those written genres which are dominant in terms of assessment (see Lea & Street, 1998; Lea, 2004; Stierer, 1997, 2006).

A narrow focus on assessment glosses over the question of whether normative genres should be resisted. Both students and academics may resist genres that have become part of their context; whether they in practice can and do resist is an interesting question. For, if genres appear in particular contexts but then become themselves part of the context and can in fact be resisted, should we be teaching students to conform or resist? Lillis (2006) calls for dialogue and interaction around texts and suggests “exploring ways in which alternative meaning

making practices in writing can be institutionally validated.” Burke and Hermerschmidt (2005) take a similar approach; Creme (2008) suggests something similar in her “transitional writing.” But how do we then deal with the fact that new genres tend to get quickly drawn into the academy, e.g., assessing learning journals (see Creme & Hunt, 2002)?

Debates such as these have become particularly pertinent as new genres of writing are taking their place in the academy. These spaces have the potential to offer a range of possibilities for explicating academic literacies principles and empowering student writers in contrast to the more essayist genres. However, a word of caution is necessary in that institutions are constantly trying to tie down new genres for assessment. For example, UK HE, under mandate from the government, is developing rigid assessment criteria based on those which have been associated with essay writing and applying these uncritically to more personal and reflective genres of writing, which were originally conceptualized as formative writing spaces. ACLITS offers possibilities to resist this focus on writing for assessment, pointing to academic writing’s potential to develop, e.g., academic identity, disciplinary meaning-making and pedagogic autonomy.

There are currently perhaps two generally accepted pedagogic models of academic writing: in one, writing is regarded as a personal act of meaning making; the other sees writing as a demonstration of the acquisition of institutional, subject or disciplinary knowledge and insiderdom. The first is largely transformative—certainly of the individual and potentially if communicated to the disciplinary and academic community, of that community’s meaning-making processes. The second is concerned with disciplined writing, in at least two senses: with the writing and the control of what John Bean (1996) called “expert insider prose.” Whatever the possibilities of the first, academics work with institutional pressures at all levels to use the second, controlling, expert model. So feedback practices tend to a default “correction” model, while the student struggling to make and communicate meaning is seen as a problem; summative assessment criteria are linked to disciplinary and professional benchmarks and genre study used to identify dominant conventions, codes and criteria.

Students can indeed be taught both about genres and about how to resist them (Devitt, this volume). However, ACLITS research draws attention to academic writing beyond the classroom, chiming with WAC’s model of a continuum between student, doctoral and faculty writing (Monroe 2002). ACLITS research is perhaps more problematizing, showing that beyond the individual teacher’s classroom, institutional pressures circumscribe and define what can be written—written, or at least accepted as “disciplined” for the purpose of being awarded a Masters or PhD and being published to the academic community. In Europe, South Africa and Australia, an academic performance culture has gone

beyond the demand to publish to the demand that publication be in a “rigorous” journal—peer-reviewed, of course, but also one accepting the role of, and accepted as, disciplinary gatekeeper. (A pressure that some academic journals are publicly resisting, publishing “alternative” critical writing in its own right and as embedded in disciplinary journal articles—see Creme, 2008, and Creme & Hunt, 2002—publishing *Essays and New Voices*, and in Special Issue “Calls” welcoming “alternatives forms of writing and experimentation with form, and different ways of giving voice.”)

At a time when UK and European university policy makers, research funding and assessment bodies seem to be demanding generic and normalized academic writing, ACLITS research illuminates both the pragmatics and problematics of genre and/in academic writing.

### **CONCLUSION: TOWARD FURTHER DIALOG**

Comparisons are difficult, first because (as we said in the introduction) WAC and ACLITS are doing different things, and secondly because the US WAC moment is large and diverse, with so many currents and conflicting strands that it is difficult to make generalizations about it. But perhaps a good place to begin is with genre theory and research methods.

The ACLITS perspective, coming out of *Ethnography of Communication* and *Applied Linguistics*, views genre as social practice rather than genre knowledge in terms of disciplinary communication per se, and its analysis is meant to unpack micro-social practices, such as “gaps” between student and teacher perceptions of particular writing activities, often embedded deeply in traditions of essayist literacy and the assessment of writing. Ethnographic methods show how genre types emerge in the detailed everyday encounters around writing in particular institutional contexts and how genre switching may be a hidden feature of pedagogy.

Not surprisingly, the ACLITS perspective on genre is perhaps closest to the sorts of WAC research that come out of linguistic anthropology and ethnomethodology. This includes the work of Dell Hymes’ student McCarthy (1987) and her work with Fishman (2000, 2002), Herrington and Moran’s (2005) research on new genres, and most especially the work of Prior (1998) and his group, who unpack the “laminated” micro-processes of student writing through longitudinal text analysis combined with ethnographic observation. Prior (this volume), along with Spinuzzi (2003) and others (Prior, Hengst, Roozen, & Shipka, 2006; Prior & Shipka, 2003), look for the surprising ways writing is embedded in genres that do not reach official status or even, sometimes, conscious recognition, and that emerge in and out of the multi-modal spaces of composing (post-it notes, marginal drawings, and so on). And they look for pedagogical possibilities in these.

The dominant North American perspective sees genre not as social practice (from the point of view of the *Ethnography of Communication*) but as social action, from a rhetorical and speech act perspective (Bazerman, 2004). This has no counterpart in ACLITS, nor does the North American research on writing in the professions toward which students move. This research may sometimes use ethnographic methods, but may also use a range of other methods: content, discourse, intertextual, rhetorical, or speech act analysis—looking at texts (even large numbers of texts) in contexts that are often viewed in historical, rhetorical, or other sociological terms rather than anthropological or ethnographic terms.

One consistent tendency in genre research in both ACLITS and WAC (apart from cognitive research on writing-to-learn in psychology) is that both are concerned to go beyond a linguistic “needs analysis” and pedagogical provision of the kind that, for example, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) has emphasized (important as these are) and look further at the wider aspects of the learning situation, in terms not only of disciplinary epistemology and methods, but also of student identity, social positioning and resistance, gender, and so on, as well as in terms of wider institutional factors.

In terms of pedagogy, ACLITS, though it has a practitioner-led aspect, has tended to be more focused on theory and research, and the relationship of writing support and “academic literacies” approaches has been less defined and institutionalized than WAC in the US. The descriptive tendency (reserving judgment, as in the best ethnographic tradition) has only begun to enter the crucible of political change on the ground in teaching and in institutional politics. WAC, by contrast, has for three decades striven to work with individual faculty and courses, to influence departmental curricula and institutions. As ACLITS begins to expand and institutionalize its interactions with teaching staff in other disciplines, it will be mutually beneficial to compare notes.

As we noted, there have been repeated calls for WAC to resist institutional practices and traditions that limit student writing and learning, calls which resonate with Lillis’ (2001) call for ACLITS to develop an academic literacies pedagogy which places the nature of dialogue at its centre and considers how to develop and validate alternative spaces for writing and meaning making in the academy. In WAC the ideological valences of writing pedagogies have been a source of controversy, as we noted, whereas it has been endemic to the ACLITS approach from the outset given its rooting in New Literacy Studies and the “ideological model” of literacy. Research on teachers who take an explicitly political approach in the WAC classroom have found resentment and counter-resistance among students (Seitz, 2004) and most WAC programs take a much more indirect approach to institutional change. (This explains why US WAC programs may appear to be “academic socialization,” in Lea

and Street's terms, but are in fact about much more.) Thus far, ACLITS seems to be taking a nuanced path, not fronting the political in the classroom or asking students themselves to directly challenge existing structures, generic or otherwise, but rather respecting their vulnerable institutional position, as in Street and colleagues' work with the King's College widening participation project. These experiments will give US advocates of critical pedagogy and their opponents something to think about. Similarly, the successes and failures of US critical pedagogy applied to the disciplines might prove instructive to ACLITS.

Future dialog might proceed on many issues and congruencies, but with healthy scholarly caution. Because WAC is older by two decades, North Americans may have to resist a feeling of *déjà vu* and consider both the institutional differences that lie behind findings and the ways in which findings are only superficially similar. For example, Crème's (2008) analysis of learning journals as transitional genres bridging personal and discipline-based genres sounds much like the decade-long US experiments with journals and learning logs (MacDonald & Cooper, 1992), but Crème's approach rests on rather different assumptions and a different HE system. Indeed, ACLITS approaches to journals might overcome a number of (in hindsight) naïve assumptions that led the move toward journals to fade, in large part, in WAC.

Similarly, the major efforts of ACLITS on assessment research, particularly "diversifying assessment" beyond the academic essay, resonate strongly with the major efforts in the US toward alternative assessment (in new or hybrid genres), which were pioneered in WAC research and practice, particularly in the mid-1990s in the journal *Assessing Writing*.

And the multi-modal, multi-literacies approach of ACLITS finds its counterpart in the Communications Across the Curriculum programs that emerged in the US in the last ten years, new versions of (or successors to) WAC programs (Hocks, 2001). But clearly there is a different valence to the concept of multi-literacies in the UK and CAC in the North America.

Similarly, there is much potential in terms of reaching beyond HE to other educational levels. ACLITS is now becoming much involved in what in the UK is called further education and what in the US is called adult education or life-long learning. WAC has not been much focused on this (despite much research on this in adult literacy in education departments), apart from some work in community colleges, and might learn much from the research of Ivanic and her colleagues, for example.

Both ACLITS and WAC have been interested in the transition from secondary to higher education, but have not developed major collaborative efforts with secondary schools, either for research or pedagogical experimentations, apart

from some work in the 1990s in the US (Farrell-Childers, Gere, & Young, 1994) and some recent work on Widening Participation in the UK that has included support for pre-university students (see above). And perhaps most importantly, neither ACLITS nor WAC have much developed a dialog with the international EAP/ESP community of second language research and teaching, which has its own varied theories of genre and approaches to teaching, often existing side-by-side with first-language efforts in universities or even departments.

Finally, we hope that this mapping of ACLITS and WAC will further discussion, not only between the US and UK, but also with other countries. While both ACLITS and WAC treat genre in social and cultural terms, there are fundamental differences in approaches to and development of genre theory, research, and pedagogy, which deserve fuller exposition and continuing mutual reading of each others' work and dialog on it.

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