Academic and Digital Literacies and Writing in the Disciplines: A Common Agenda?

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Abstract

Reviewing keynotes and papers presented at the 2005, 2007 and 2009 EATAW conferences, and subsequent academic and digital literacies research, this paper considers the current agenda for academic writing teachers. It discusses pedagogic issues arising, for instance, from research on genre, multimodality, online communities, and the challenges and resources for the generation of students problematically called the 'net generation'. Looking at two wings of academic writing research, those focusing on the 'textual' and those on processes and contexts, it raises the question of a common agenda for disciplinary writing studies, one exploring the transformatory processes and effects of disciplinary meaning making in 'the digital university'.

Introduction

Going back through my notes from the last few EATAW conferences I was struck by the two wings of writing research represented and discussed. I see these as wings in two senses: as in the parts of a building – enclosing, and linked but separate – and as in the necessary, uplifting wings of a bird or plane. Researchers and teachers of genre studies, academic literacies, comparative languages and literatures, multimodal and foreign/academic purposes language studies, and writing across the curriculum/in the disciplines specialists – all can come under one of those two wings.[1]

The first wing focuses on texts, seeing writing as a practice that can and should be taught, with outcomes of that practice that can be studied and analysed. Academic writing itself is a separate field of study; texts are seen as discrete objects of study; aspects such as argument, critical thinking and genre can be analysed and discriminated by context; good practice can be modeled and disseminated to and by its disciplinary or institutional community. Ken Hyland's authoritative 2007 EATAW keynote, 'Teaching and researching genre: academic writing in the disciplines', in talking of genre as like a recipe book, was focusing on the text as product and textual models as canonical: after all, recipes are meant to be followed. In their seminal book, *Writing: Texts, Processes, and Practices* (Candlin and Hyland 1999) he and fellow scholar Christopher Candlin had shown how research articles could be grouped according to different citation practices; in his 2007 keynote Hyland emphasized genre studies' discriminating possibilities:

> pointing to the fact that texts are successful only when they employ conventions that other members of the community find familiar and convincing. This community-based nature of genres means that they are likely to differ across disciplines and this has important consequences for teachers who need to identify the genres students will have to write and then make the key features of these genres explicit to students (Hyland 2007).

Both genre and citation studies here take academic writing to be inherent in and analysable from exemplary products such as journal articles – themselves accepted as such by the academic community which 'gatekeeps' the discipline by controlling the dissemination of disciplinary writing by

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[1] Abstracts and details of presenters and keynotes cited below as EATAW 2009 can be found at <http://wwwm.coventry.ac.uk/eataw2009/Documents/EATAW%20B%20of%20A%20FINAL.pdf>

the process of rigorous peer-review. Such a model can be seen as prescriptive and essentialist, with the task of the teachers of academic writing being that of advising on how such formal criteria can be met.[2] That is to say, researchers in this 'wing' focus on writing outputs as the 'material correlates' of the practice of academic writing; a practice modelled, determined and maintained by disciplinarians – researchers, publishers and teachers in the discipline. So Hyland can use journal articles to research and render transparent determining disciplinary conventions, and can draw upon the work of Malcolm Tight to identify 'tribes or communities of practice' by analysing co-citations in journals in one field (Tight 2008).

Lillis and Scott, in their *Journal of Applied Linguistics* Special Issue, talked of this 'wing' as distinguished by a ' "textual bias" – the treatment of language/writing as solely or primarily a linguistic object – evident in quite distinct academic traditions of language study [such as] genre' (2007: 10–11). This 'wing' they see as 'originating in "English as a foreign language" [which was] at the centre of both pedagogic and research interest [...] influenced by work in applied linguistics, notably that of Swales and his specific theories of genre and discourse (Swales 2004); and by a range of text-focused approaches aiming to make visible the textual features of different academic discourses' (Lillis and Scott 2007: 10–11). They distinguish 'academic literacies', rather, by the privileging of practice above text and suggest that a 'textual' treatment of language/writing as solely or primarily a linguistic object is evident in a number of apparently quite distinct academic traditions of language study: genre, rhetorical form etc. (Lillis and Scott 2007).

Technology can very successfully sit underneath this 'textual' wing, a wing which researches, analyses and debates academic writing as product, one to which tools can be applied; memorable for me was Lotte Rienecker's 2005 EATAW keynote, 'Writing Software *as a Tool* for Teaching Genre' [my italics] which graphically illustrated:

> a piece of writing software for university students across disciplines that write all types of research papers, from BA projects to Master's theses. The content represents an integration of writing courses/tutorials and library courses/tutorials on writing and literature search. Using the software is meant as a shortcut for the writer to focus and form a research question, design a strategy for literature search, write the introduction for the paper, and prepare for the first meeting with the advisor (Reinecker 2005).

Both Reinecker and the 2009 EATAW keynote speaker, Christian Schunn, model writing as a coherent and separatable practice, something which can be facilitated and improved by a pedagogic innovation using a digital tool:

> I have been systematically examining the strengths and weaknesses of student peer reviewing of writing in various university contexts, using a web-based peer review system called SWoRD (Scaffolded Writing and Rewriting in the Discipline) *as the research setting and tool* (Schunn EATAW 2009) [my italics].

The second and complementary 'wing' focuses on the writer herself rather than the academic output, sees academic writing as a developmental, potentially transformative process; as a rich but extensive recursive process (as described by Gabriela Ruhmann in her heartfelt 2009 EATAW keynote, struggling as she then was to communicate the understanding of writing as process against considerable resistance from the disciplinary academics whom she was tasked with advising). Such disciplinary academics frequently hold a simple deficit model of student writing, whereby any problem is seen to be the student's and one to be fixed before or alongside their disciplinary work. This model has been called the 'jug' model, whereby the teacher envisages the student as an empty jug to be filled up with knowledge and understanding by her teachers. Writing is the pouring out onto paper of that knowledge and understanding; any problems experienced by the student can be seen as that student's fault: the 'jug' is flawed – the student is insufficiently intelligent or skilled – or is 'blocked': some lack or unpreparedness or attention and engagement deficit prevents the completion of the writing task. Academic literacies studies provide rich alternative models to this, and other facile

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[2] For a more mobile model of genre, see, for example, 'Exploring notions of genre in "academic literacies" and "writing across the curriculum": approaches across countries and contexts' (Russell *et al.* 2009).

models of the writing process, drawing on a number of disciplinary fields and subfields such as applied linguistics and sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociocultural theories of learning, new literacy studies and discourse studies, forming a field of enquiry with a specific epistemological and ideological stance towards the study of academic communication and particularly, to date, writing.

Whereas 'wing one' focuses on identifying academic conventions – at one or more levels of grammar, discourse, rhetorical structure or genre – and on (or with a view to) exploring how students might be taught to become proficient or 'expert', and developing materials on that basis, a 'wing two' approach in contrast involves an interest in such questions, but in addition is concerned with: a) locating such conventions in relation to specific and contested traditions of knowledge making; b) eliciting the perspectives of writers (whether students or professionals) on the ways in which such conventions impinge on their meaning making and c) exploring alternative ways of meaning making in academia, not least by considering the resources that (student) writers bring to the academy as legitimate tools for meaning making (Lillis and Scott 2007). This wing acknowledges academic writing's vital contribution to the field of academic literacies by highlighting conventions in relation to specific and contested traditions of knowledge making and stimulating explorations of alternative ways – and alternative modes – of meaning-making in academia.

'Writing and New Technologies'

The rapid development of, and generous funding for, new technologies provides both opportunities and challenges for both wings: those who see writing research as essentially textual and normative and those who look to transformational effects of the process and the developmental possibilities for the writer. 'Writing and New Technologies' – one theme of the EATAW 2009 conference – 'showcased' a range of writing development in and with digital resources. Digital literacies, like academic literacies, arose in a time of need: need to support, cost- efficiently, skills develoment when higher education was rapidly expanding. So, digital writing projects - such as the University of Reading's 'Online Academic Writing Support' (Furneaux and Taylor); Coventry University's Coventry Online Writing Lab: COWL (Ganobcsik-Williams and Broughan); Staffordshire University's Assignment Survival Kit: ASK (Cohen *et al.*); the University of Trento's Online Dissertation Writing Workshop (Beittel), a Ukrainian Advanced Writing online course and VLE (Kaluzhna), a Parallel Writing Corpus for Japanese applicants to English-Medium universities (Mark) and Coventry University's free-to-use web-based screencasting software for providing feedback (Brick) – all provided case studies of innovative and supportive uses of digital media.

Several more such case studies presented at EATAW 2009 by those involved in developing, researching and evaluating online writing explored specifically pedagogic aspects: whether blogging acted as disinhibiting or daunting (Ellis and Hicks); how a discussion board could faciliate an awareness of plagiarism (Tang); whether an online induction course could increase retention in those crossing the threshold into professional and doctoral work (Dujardin and Farbey); whether computer mediated communication (CMC) promotes pre-writing and equalises participation (Alipanahi and Sani); whether e-portfolios foster student-centered learning and ownership (Bräuer); whether and how the Universities of Leeds' and Coventry's dynamic, networked, dissertation learning environment, by providing online social scaffolding, enables tacit knowledge to be articulated for academic writing (O'Rourke *et al.*), and how online classrooms can cater flexibly for diverse and non-traditional students (e.g. at Lviv (Ivashchyshyn *et al.*) and at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Monaco). These are exemplary also in looking specifically at students' technology-facilitated 'textual practice around learning' rather than at 'technologies and their applications', for as Lea and Jones conclude, 'in order to understand the changes that are taking place for learners in today's higher education, more attention needs to be paid to textual practice around learning and less to the technologies and their applications' (Lea and Jones 2011, forthcoming).

The evaluation of such projects is vital: 'digital literacies' research follows on the wider concerns of academic literacies in its concern to resist educational 'digital determinism'. This, like 'technological determinism' before it, presumes overtly or covertly that the possibilities of the new communicative and expressive media drive learning and therefore should drive teaching and assessment. In their 'Literacy in the Digital University: The Relation of New Media Practices to Traditional Literacy Practices in the Academy and the Professions', Lea and Goodfellow unpack and critique the 'digital'

aspect of 'digital literacies' and the 'digital university' (a place filled by digital natives (Bennett *et al.* 2008) and the 'net generation') dispersed within a 'Learning 2.0' (plural and often informal) environment (Lea and Goodfellow 2009).

The Interface between Pedagogy and Academic and Digital Literacies

Three intersecting areas of needful digital research go to this interface of pedagogy with academic and digital literacies: firstly, that into the operation and possibilities of online communities (several 2009 EATAW papers drew on Goodfellow and Lamy's then newly-published *Learning Cultures in Online Education* (2009), especially the editors' 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion'; Charles Ess' chapter, 'When the Solution Becomes the Problem: Cultures and Individuals As Obstacles to Online Learning' and Robert Dowd's 'Entering the World of Online Foreign Language Education: Challenging and Developing Teacher Identities').[3] Goodfellow and Lamy (2009: 171) conclude:

> A major topic in all of the chapters is the cultural identity or identities of participants, viewed from a variety of perspectives, including how they 'see' themselves and those they interact with online, and how they are positioned by the social roles available in the particular learning context in which they find themselves. The authors have focused variously on identities characterized as: 'third' or 'hybrid', 'selfidentity', 'cybernetic/virtual' 'emerging', 'performed', 'postnational', 'marketed' etc. In this they direct our attention to a key aspect of culture in [online] learning environments, that is, the relation between the embodied 'self' and online social 'identity'.

Such research into the operation and effectiveness of online communities was explored in depth by 'Words, Bridges and Dialogue: Issues of Audience and Addressivity in Online Communication' (McKenna 2005), one of the bases of Kear's 2010 *Online and Social Networking Communities*. Such explorations of addressivity and communication bring digital literacies squarely into the field of academic communication and rhetorical studies.

The second area of research 'at the interface' is into multimodality and its affordances (opportunities and environmental factors which can help or hinder); Janet Jones, EATAW 2009, drew on 'the exciting field of multimodal semiotics - the diverse ways in which a number of distinct semiotic resource systems such as language, image and sound work together to construe meaning - and its educational applications in a variety of contexts'. In a direct answer to fears of 'digital determinism' she stressed that 'a key concern of multimodal research is to analyse', not just celebrate, 'multimodal meaning in online learning' (her research has informed the development of the Australian Government-funded WRiSE site to support scientific report writing).

Multimodalality takes researchers into a, if not the, central question of academic writing: its deep form. For it forces us to ask the basic question: what is writing anyway? This question was asked by Flusser (2011) in *Writing: Does Writing Have a Future?,* and by Nancy Roth, quoting Flusser's description of the ongoing broad shift in the position of writing with respect to other means of communication, its role shrinking to that of a pre-text in both her presentation at EATAW 2009 and subsequent article (Roth 2010).

What is writerly voice, what argument, in a digital and multimodal world, in a world of students whose '"preferred" (i.e. derived from everyday life) practices […] were [...] collaborative, multimodal, generative, non-linear, using multimedia, and determined by their own choice' (Ivanič *et al.* 2009: 711)? One of the findings of a study which 'did not set out with specific reference to digital contexts, its aim was to identify ways in which people can bring literacy practices from one context into another to act as resources for learning in the new context' (Satchwell and Ivanič 2007:303). This brings further questions such as, what is dialogue, what writerly identity? (see Lillis 2011 and Nancy Lea Eik-Nes' 2009 EATAW paper 'Dialogging: Providing Space for Developing Disciplinary Identity'). And, especially important for EATAW, what is identity and how is it constructed in multinational online communities (see also Goodfellow and Lamy 2009)?

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[3] Dowd's chapter is now complemented by Coleman *et al.* 'Collaboration and interaction: the keys to distance and computer-supported language learning' (Coleman *et al.* 2010)).

Some of the EATAW 2009 papers also challenge the boundaries of academic writing altogether: what kind of writing properly expresses an art or design thesis? (See Davies and Riley's EATAW 2009 'Making an Essay: Creative Approaches to Academic Writing for Students in Art and Design' and 'Writing Purposefully in Art and Design: responding to converging and diverging new academic literacies' (Lockheart and Melles 2011; see also Lockheart and Wood n.d.)). And is technology removing the soul of writing – which should retain its craft roots, as Sally Mitchell unforgettably argued in her 2009 EATAW keynote (later published as Mitchell 2010)? And what about the interrelationship of writing and reading? ('Reading Strategies for Writing Practice: The Push to Move Online', Karen Lacey, EATAW 2009); of Writing and Speech: see, for example, 'Speaking of speech with the disciplines' (Compton 2010).

Such research at the interface between learning and technology, between literacies and textual studies – raises the largest issues of the processes, purposes and forms of academic writing. As Kress pointed out in his keynote to the 2010 'Multimodality and Learning Conference':

> A focus on the availability and use of many modes in settings of learning and teaching forces us to look freshly at some persistent issues: knowledge and curriculum; social processes and forms of pedagogy; design, representation and communication; technologies of production and dissemination; institutions, sites, power; and neither last nor least, the issue of learning which entails all in some way (Kress 2010: abstract).

Academic Writing, Academic Literacies, Writing in the Disciplines: A Common Agenda

> [...] the literacy demands of the curriculum [involve] a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields, and disciplines. From a student point of view a dominant feature of academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes (Street 2004: 15).

What it seems to me brings professionals together as teachers of academic writing, as workers at the coalface as well as the interface, is a common agenda – to empower students as best we can as *writers* not [just] as producers of texts. This involves 'envoicing' them as students, as critical thinkers and intellectuals, students who necessarily operate within, address, and are assessed by, an institution. Within the normative frameworks of academia and its communities, power is largely devolved to a variety of teachers who will have different requirements, requiring transparency of those requirements and criteria by the institution and code- and genre-switching skills by the student.

But there is more to envoicing them as writers: more than the ability to code switch and to work within institutional and disciplinary conventions; in order to envoice them, enable them to identify themselves within, and see themselves as contributors to, the intellectual community, they have to be 'writers of' and 'writing in'. For there is another dimension to writing as empowering: that looking to academic writing as transformatory both of an academic community and of the writer's identity, her voice and sense of self.

Coming as I do from a Writing in the Disciplines (WiD) background, I see that epistemological and ontological 'home' as disciplinary. As a disciplinary teacher myself I was formed and informed by the Cornell program of the early 2000s, of intensive disciplinary writing courses both in foundation years and the Majors (Monroe 2002). From 'WiD' I took two lessons very deeply to heart: firstly that writing is a process of meaning-making not just a display of knowledge and skills (beautifully argued by Gabriela Ruhmann in her EATAW 2009 keynote and in Lillis *passim*, especially 2006 and 2011), and secondly that a discipline is a discourse community and community of textual practice, moved on by all writing in that discipline.

This is to propose that there is a difference in emphasis in those coming with a WiD approach in seeing that each piece of writing 'writes the discipline'. WiD presumes an investment by the student in a transformatory activity: transformatory of both self and discipline rather than seeing the student as navigating through different requirements and different requirers.

The EATAW 2009 conference discussed this distinction between the different sitings of the student as writer, a discussion invigorated by Sally Mitchell's keynote: is using language, and so writing, a prescribed, code-obeying activity and/or something different, more of a 'handicraft'? Those present will not forget her use of the story of the Emperor's New Clothes to illustrate the importance of 'crafted language' in her splendid rhetoric against 'Quality Assurance'-speak and other coded language promoted in the cause of 'transparency':

> The language [of Graduate Attributes being discussed, which excluded writing] promises that graduates – by implication all graduates – will emerge from the university with a standardized set of recognizable qualities […] If we wrap up what we're after in the high level generalities of 'QA-speak', we will simultaneously lose its meaning and impact.

> In agreeing to have the clothes made, the Emperor is cleverly caught in a double-bind in which the invisible is made visible; and the link lies in the need to believe in the equivalence of one with the other. While watching one of the Emperor's oldest counsellors pretending to admire the invisible clothes, so the story goes, 'No-one would let it be noticed that they saw nothing, for that would have shown that he was not fit for office, or was very stupid.'

> In the story the characters are supposed to look at something everyone wise enough can see, but in fact there is nothing to see – or rather there is something to see, something in fact very real – the Emperor's naked body – it's just that no-one (with anything to lose) can find the words to say that they can see this. It's hugely difficult to speak outside the prevailing discourse [...] But necessary to do so [...] (Mitchell EATAW 2009).

Mitchell's tenor was challenging as well as inspiring; helping students to meet the objectives and requirements of the course assessments is surely exactly the role of the teacher of writing. But, seeing our discourse and our objectives as 'transparent' courts the danger that behind the discourse there is nothing there, for us or our students. There is therefore a danger in seeing discourse as a tool to be wielded with skill to meet a given outcome; language, speech and writing must, rather be creating new, real textures. Sally Mitchell, one of the key UK developers of the Cornell model of WiD into Queen Mary, University of London's 'Thinking Writing' programme,[4] goes beyond seeing the student as learning to deploy language tools, but sees, rather, language use as creating as well as demonstrating understanding, each piece of writing as establishing the writer *as* a writer, a member of a community.

So, there is a difference of approach and of message here: between writing as [only] the medium whereby knowledge and skills are demonstrated and assessed in the recognised form and the WiD's idea of writing as fluid and enabling. The first sees the disciplinary or academic paradigm as controlling and controlled, as operating through normative forms of writing: essays, arguments, standard format papers and assignments; sees academics as well as students as necessarily conforming to conventions of scholarly outputs: both students and postgraduates working on and producing authorised outputs in the form of regulated articles, papers, theses, dissertations etc. However, for those approaching language teaching from a WiD perspective, each act of writing is both an epistemological and ontological act: each piece of writing 'writes the discipline'; each piece of writing establishes the writer as a member of a disciplinary community.

These dimensions do not contradict each other – much research into the development of students' writing has shown that academic writing skills teaching is often most effectively delivered as part of a subject-specific learning programme (Ganobcsik-Williams 2006), even or especially in deficit situations such as post-apartheid South Africa (Warren 2002). Some European – such as France's *La Didactique* (Brereton 2009) – and some international Scholarship of Teaching and Learning disciplinary models[5] posit a clear relationship between disciplinary knowledge and skills and their teaching. (The UK Higher Education Academy Learning and Teaching Subject Centres, sadly about to be closed, have for a decade invested in

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[4] See <http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/>
[5] See discipline and domain special interest groups,
<http://www.issotl.org/interest_groups_affiliates.html>

such disciplinary pegagogic projects[6]), but there is an extra dimension to WiD as focusing on writing itself as potentially mutually transformatory of both writer and discipline.

In practice, there are places and stages for both under colleagues' common, shared paradigm of academic writing. But there is a real difference, as I see it, between the claims that can be made for students' writing. For a WiD framing brings an extra dimension and, for the teacher, an extra responsibility, to both disciplinary and institutional community: each act of WiD writing 'writes the discipline', is a transformational act and inscibes the writer as a member of an evolving disciplinary community. Further, it is incumbent on the teacher to disseminate that writing, that disciplinary meaning-making, in some way or another – perhaps in her own disciplinary writing or reported in a paper or newlsetter. This worked well at Cornell University in an institution investing heavily – in prestige as well as money – in 'Writing in the Majors': in developing disciplinary teachers expert in writing pedagogy and a team of academic developers expert and accepted as co-teachers in disciplinary teaching, and in a Center for Writing in the Disciplines with its own structures, post graduate fellowships, prizes and journal (Parker 2009). The EATAW 2009 conference provided examples of such disciplinary writing initiatives (e.g. Writing for Engineering in Germany (Jakobs), UK (Day) and Spain (Fernández); see also 'Challenges of developing engineering students' writing through peer assessment', a presentation at the 'Inspiring the next generation of engineers' conference by a team of Thinking Writing and a professor of Engineering (McConlogue, Mueller and Shelton 2010).

Conclusion: Disciplinary Digital Literacies

Digital literacies is a very rapidly developing field, posing and producing challenging questions (see especially Goodfellow's critical review of recent literature around the 'literacies of the digital' exploring the continuing role of critical literacy in relation to the idea that digital literacies are transformative for pedagogy in this sector (Goodfellow 2011).

Lea and Jones (2011, forthcoming) conclude that their project findings:

> illustrate the complex interrelationship between literacies and technologies with the potential to disrupt conventional academic literacy practices.

> However, they also offer strong evidence for students' ongoing reliance on the authority of the institution when it comes to accessing and utilising web-based resources for their assignments. The authors suggest that, in order to understand the changes that are taking place for learners in today's higher education, more attention needs to be paid to textual practice around learning and less to the technologies and their applications.

Such attention, this paper concludes, will come not from large scale studies, though such do tell us about students' comfort and disinhibition – or discomfort and inhibition – in using digital technologies ('that students, even if part of the 'net generation' are not 'necessarily as technologically literate as may be presumed' (Allin, Thompson and Turnock 2010, Ellis and Hicks EATAW 2009, and Guo, Dobson and Petrina 2008). For, although the literature provides some rich accounts of students' use of technology:

> at present it still stops short of in-depth or detailed examination of what students actually do in contexts when they are using these different applications, or how meanings are being made from, and through, engagement with digital technologies; we know little about the processes of meaning-making for student learners in a digital age (Goodfellow 2011: 134).

Recent EATAW conference and other 'case studies' highlight the need to offer such 'in-depth or detailed examination' of particular meaning making, and that, in Higher Education, means meaning making in a discipline, in an institutional context and concerned with the effects of weighing multimodal sources. WiD emphasises that writing is transformational for both writer and disciplinary community; studies of the effect on students' constructions of identity such as those in Goodfellow

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[6] See <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ subjectcentres>

and Lamy (2009) suggest that online communication offers many new such constructions and it would be fascinating to continue work exporing how that feeds into their disciplinary writing.

Meanwhile, Lea and Jones (2011, forthcoming) research showing the 'complex interrelationship between literacies and technologies [which have] the potential to disrupt conventional academic literacy practices' also shows that it results in an increased dependence on the *institution's* meaning making, leaving students with the understanding that disciplinary writing is a matter of cutting and pasting a variety of sources in a variety of modes into one coherent output without creating their own argument or significance-highlighting, critical narrative – a battle that disciplinary teachers have been fighting since Socrates.

So, Lea and Jones' work cited above indicates that there is an enduring problem even or especially in institutions with full, supportive and rich digital resources for students who were adept in using them:

> Our participants were adept at drawing on complex, hybrid, textual genres, using a range of technologies and applications and integrating these into both their assessed and unassessed work. Arguably, this is a far more complex task than that which was required of students before the era of digital technologies permeated both the curricular and personal spheres of textual practice. In addition, students' accounts of working with multiple sources also illustrate the dominance of reading in a digital world; in many ways, bringing reading – in contrast to writing – to the fore in students' literacy practices. Reading is integral to the choices that students make around the textual resources available to them for use in their studies and to the integration of this diversity of textual knowledge into their assignments. We have clearly moved a long way from the days when students accessed the library for key texts, which would form the basis of their essay writing. Despite this hybridity, what remains constant is students' reliance on the authority of the institution. (Lea and Jones 2011 forthcoming).

The primary educational battle, to support students in creating a rich and multifaceted disciplinary identity in writing that demonstrates and also creates disciplinary meaning, is ongoing and is addressed by both 'wings' of writing research presented at recent EATAW conferences. Perhaps digital literacies have a more complex question to research – one which needs now to be continued in individual studies of the sort presented at EATAW conferences – but the essential question raised by Flusser (2011) – 'What is writing anyway?' – is the same.

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