

14 Intersection and Challenges in the Teaching of Academic Writing: Voices from Europe and Latin America

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It has been two decades since the establishment of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) marked by the 10th Conference of its association in 2019. Since then, the world of Academic Writing has been facing dramatic changes but at the same time remains rather the same. This is to say that even though the abundance of new technologies has been growing rapidly, bringing new models for the teaching of writing in general, experience in this realm of interaction is still lacking. If twenty years ago traditional methods, such as teachers being the holders of all knowledge and transmitting it to students was sufficient, this is no longer the case today. Students that enter higher education in the present days are those who were born immersed in the benefits and challenges arising from technology, and so education has had to shape and adapt to accompany the developments of these new natives.

Such exposition to the many different social media starts to build up a larger heterogeneous academic community, these communities are human institutions with actions and understandings influenced by personal and interpersonal relationships, as well as institutional and sociocultural issues that are associated with broad areas of knowledge (Hyland, 2009). Much of the content available in these contexts is usually produced and consumed in a foreign language, at least when it comes to Latin America. The consumption of this material in another language might bring problems to the writing in both first and foreign languages and English as the medium of instruction (EMI) is hardly a reality to this side of the world. Donahue (2018) says that today we face a highly diversified student population in higher education due to many factors. Building writing courses tailored to the “new” studentship is becoming even more problematic as disciplines have typical characteristics and must be understood based on specific knowledge, methodologies and practices shared by the members of a given community (Bathia, 2004).

As a consequence, Contexts of Culture and Situation (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) need to be taken into account when writing models are conceptualized as the ways of thinking, constructing and consuming knowledge in places where professional practices are negotiated and give rise to interdisciplinary discourses. In this manner, the term discipline can be used to describe and differentiate knowledge, institutional structures, researchers, and students in the educational setting as the term encompasses norms, specific epistemologies, its typical goals, and the practices that are carried out to achieve these specific goals. Nonetheless, a question that urgently needs to be answered, and has many faces to it, is: In this post- (if one can say that) pandemic period, what have teachers and professors and the other professionals involved in education learned in terms of what needs to be done for central and peripheral educational contexts to enhance their teaching practices in different international educational settings?

I will, in this piece of writing, attempt to reflect on an answer to this question trying to bring together the European context represented by the nine chapters of this collection of papers from the 2019 Conference of the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing and the Latin American context represented by the Latin American Association of Writing Studies in Higher Education and Professional Contexts (ALES), as I am currently a steering committee member of this association and the chair of the III ALES Conference.

In the context of the nine chapters of this collection, authors agree on the fact that writing needs to be seen as more than an assessment tool, but as a learning tool that guides students in examining, organizing, analyzing and synthesizing ideas. The studies that are presented in these chapters reflect on the tools and skills needed to aid higher education students in the development of academic writing as a set of abilities not taught as a recipe or a formula, but as a repertoire of communication strategies. However, one cannot leave aside the fact that any type of communication is construed within contexts of use. Taken into consideration the interconnectedness of this globalized and opulent world we live in, I would like to bring Bauman's (2001) concept of "liquid modernity" into this reflection. According to him, it is possible to see remarkable changes in the educational scenario in the production, distribution, acquisition, assimilation, and use of knowledge. Students are no longer passive; they have become part of knowledge construction well pointed in Castelló's and in Anson's papers. If we move down to the Latin American context, research has shown, in the ALES context, as for instance Navarro (2019), that we need to feed students with content, but also with critical thinking, capable of revising models that are currently unable

to cope with dialoguing in the present scenario. In this sense, Parodi (2008) points out to the importance of finding ways to reach robust results based on large international corpora as a way of linguistically describing discourse variation among languages to develop an overview of similarities, and most importantly, differences across languages, disciplines and the institutions and workplaces where these discourses are realized.

As writing is permeated by many activity systems and the act of writing runs through both individual and collective spheres, academic writing is an achievement to be developed as a result of comprehensive practice shown in the papers presented in this collection and the collection entitled *Escrita na Universidade: Panoramas e Desafios na América Latina* (Pereira, 2018). Both of these volumes look at academic writing as an interactional dimension, motivated by its contexts and users, thus, studies that look at continuities, complementarities, and similarities can be seen as a concrete contribution to a common space for academic writing studies in higher education. Focusing, then, on the discovery of new knowledge and the development of teaching and research, perhaps it is time to globally collect theoretical and practical contributions which might lead to the reflection on the various aspects that can characterize and differentiate how academic genres in this new technological era are produced and maintained by social practices as this is the way members of the academic world interact with each other.

An interesting initiative is a global project put out by a group of scholars from many different countries worldwide looking at metaphors during COVID-19 and how this may shape language use around the world for years to come. The project is entitled Covid Metaphors Project and it is set to help scholars understand the dimension of shared human efforts to deal with the pandemic and its consequences. The main idea is to develop a global corpus that will contribute to an international description of the increased global awareness of the human dimensions and communication demands of healthcare. The researchers of the project believe that by putting together researchers from different areas of expertise, namely, academics, clinicians, caregivers, and people from business and the industry, it is possible to document and explore experiences to connect peripheral and central countries exploring fields and methodologies in healthcare communication as a way of collaborating to healthcare delivery.¹ I would like to argue that by giving attention to social issues such as healthcare and bringing it back to the classroom, we are able to increase writing proficiency in these institutions. Thus, the genres instantiated at workplaces may be used as materials for teaching writing tools appropriate

1 More information may be retrieved from: <https://hedra.eu>

for learning and examining as well as analyzing the functions of language so as to communicate knowledge in an academic paper. As may be seen, then, teaching how to write is a central issue in the many curricular disciplines and as research universities become more international in focus, there is a need to strengthen teaching and learning cross-culturally across all levels and disciplines in higher education.

According to Bauman (2001), since the beginning of times knowledge has been evaluated based on the ability one has to “faithfully” represent reality. In this knowledge intensive society, the world that surrounds us, and writing being one of the spheres, is in constant change and it challenges the representation one has of current knowledge. With the fierce growth of technology, there is a need for constant innovation when it comes to the teaching of writing, and teaching in general, so that writing is not held back and thus fragmenting knowledge. The ease of accessing information has put down many obstacles in research that make us unconsciously ignore distances. Hence, as the world is being transformed, we need to develop skills and techniques necessary for the teaching of writing that is truly meaningful with the use of digital technologies in higher education. However, there is a twist to all of this, the distances that become invisible to teachers, researchers and educators cannot push aside the classroom the human component (Melonashi et al., in this volume) of interpersonal relations that are meaningful to knowledge construction and exchange of experience between individuals.

It seems, then, that both European and Latin American contexts are undergoing similar transformations and academic writing does not stay behind. As one can say, in any side of the globe, it is clear that people in general are writing more, even though, this amount of writing cannot be evaluated in terms of its quality. I would like, then, to conclude with a call for potential dialogue and collaboration across EATAW and ALES as sites where we are able to address current imperatives in the teaching of academic writing. By tying the world together through literate participation, it is possible to advance writing competence that allows us to share knowledge and research together.

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