

USING A READING JOURNAL TO DEVELOP SOURCE USE COMPETENCIES FOR ACADEMIC WRITING

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Appropriate incorporation of source material in academic writing can be challenging for university students, and those who struggle to demonstrate competency in this area can run into issues with plagiarism. Pedagogic approaches to reducing plagiarism often take the complementary routes of explicit teaching on academic integrity combined with instruction on source use and referencing (Pecorari and Petric, 2014). This presentation will describe an instructional tool used in an Academic Reading course on a pre-Masters program for students entering an EMI university in Kazakhstan. Students are required to keep a Reading Journal throughout the two semester course. This involves sustained practice in referencing and record-keeping, summarising, note-taking and responding to ideas in a text, all stages which are recognised as foundational before students are able to successfully incorporate source material into their written work while maintaining a clear distinction between the student's thoughts and the author's words and ideas (Cumming, Lai and Cho, 2016). In this session, the presenters will describe the pedagogic theory underpinning the Reading Journal design and implementation in their course, give some reflections on its use in practice, and invite audience members to consider applications in their own teaching and course design contexts.

Keywords: academic writing, source use, plagiarism pedagogy, reading journal

Category: A case study

Theme: Innovative institutional practices in academic integrity

INTRODUCTION

Appropriate incorporation of source material in academic writing can be challenging for university students, and those who struggle to demonstrate competence in this area can run into issues with plagiarism. Many teachers working with students in an English-medium environment have encountered such issues, and may be particularly aware of issues concerning students who are not familiar with English language academic conventions relating to source use from their previous studies. Often this is approached from an academic writing perspective. However, in this article we contend that some of the difficulties faced by students for whom English is not their first language may stem from difficulties related to reading in English. We propose a Reading

Journal as an instructional tool which can promote academic integrity through sustained practice of source use competencies.

The first question to address regarding academic integrity is what it actually means. Demonstrating academic integrity in writing through appropriate integration of sources is, in large part, founded on the understanding of 'ownership' of ideas (see Scolon, 1994) which could be seen as having Western, individualistic origins. In contrast, it has been claimed that some East Asian cultures may not view ownership and attribution in the same way, and so shared knowledge which is available in the community becomes 'universal knowledge' (Nelson, 2017). While we should be careful to avoid unhelpful generalisations, teachers should at least be aware that different cultural perspectives on ownership of ideas may exist.

When students do not fully acknowledge ownership of ideas and do not correctly attribute ownership in their written work, they can run into problems with plagiarism. Our institution defines plagiarism as "[a]n act in which a student seeks to claim credit for the work or efforts of another without authorization or citation" (NU Student Code of Conduct, 2015, p. 6). In their state-of-the-art review on plagiarism in second language writing, Pecorari and Petrić (2014, p. 270) recognise that the question of intention in defining plagiarism is vexed. Some authors argue that a writer must intentionally take the work of another and choose not to cite it in order to fall foul of plagiarism policies. Others argue that unintentional plagiarism can occur. Our institution takes the latter position, and our policy states that "intentionally or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own" (NU Student Code of Conduct, 2015, p.6) will incur penalties for plagiarism. Therefore, if a student does not share the institution's perspective on ownership of ideas, they may encounter problems with plagiarism despite lacking any intent to mislead a reader by misusing their sources. In this context, we agree with Emerson, Reese and MacKay (2005) in arguing that it "behooves academic institutions to consider the causes and nature of the problem [of plagiarism] and to consider how the issue should be addressed" (p. 13).

In an effort to reduce instances of plagiarism, many institutions make an effort to inform students about academic integrity and the requirement to correctly cite and reference sources. However, Landau, Druen and Arcuri (2002), in a study comparing methods, found that "[a]n admonishment to avoid plagiarism was the least effective method for helping students detect and reduce plagiarism" (p. 114) and instead advocated a mixed training approach which includes teaching students to paraphrase. While we fully acknowledge that

informing students about plagiarism policies and penalties is a positive step, in our experience a stand-alone session may not be sufficient for a student to fully grasp the concept of ownership of ideas and the need for attribution. Pecorari and Petrić (2014) note that avoiding plagiarism takes more than being informed about university policy and being shown referencing rules. Indeed, in their review of the literature, they found that “[t]here is general agreement that a comprehensive approach to teaching source use” is needed (p. 288). Consequently, in addition to teaching students the academic writing skills of citing, referencing and paraphrasing, we believe that students also need to develop their academic reading skills and that specific instruction in some core source use competencies can help students with appropriate text integration.

First, before students are able to integrate text from a source into their assignment, it is important that they have reasonable comprehension of their source. Sole et al (2013, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho, 2016, p. 51) found that students who did not fully comprehend the texts they were using tended to rely more heavily than others on reproductive patterns of writing and copying ideas. Researchers have also found “significant correlations between students’ (a) prior knowledge of a topic and general literacy abilities and (b) the accuracy of their written summaries” (Perin, Keselman and Monopoli, 2003, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho, 2016, p. 51). Furthermore, in a separate study of Thai students writing in English, it was found that writers who had difficulties finding the main ideas in a text, had inadequate vocabulary and had problems restructuring ideas in a text tended to use “a compensatory strategy of frequent, short copied strings from the sources in their writing” (McDonough, Crawford and De Vleeschauwer, 2014, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho, 2016, p. 51). This suggests that students who spend time developing their general reading skills, and who spend time trying to comprehend the texts they have chosen to include in their work are more likely to integrate their sources appropriately.

Second, note-taking, paraphrasing and summarising are useful strategies for working with texts before students integrate sections of sources into their work, and students should have ample opportunities to practice these skills in a supportive learning environment (Pecorari and Petrić, 2014, p. 288). We have found that requiring students to take notes on a text helps to promote self-monitoring of comprehension. Our students have also reported that producing a graphic representation of ideas in a text requires much deeper processing of the ideas and the structure of argumentation in comparison to making linear notes. And as the process of taking notes requires students to focus on the ideas in a text, and therefore focus less on the particular choice of words of an author, we have noticed that after note-taking, students are much better equipped to

express an author's ideas in their own words instead of simply restructuring sentences or substituting words in an attempt to paraphrase.

Finally, students should be encouraged to engage in a dialogue with the text while they are reading. Critical reading as an essential academic skill has long been recognised (see, for example, Fairburn and Winch, 2011). Students should be encouraged to ask questions of the text and make connections between ideas, rather than passively reading and accepting what is on the page. Hirvela and Du (2013, p. 96, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho, 2016, p.50) highlight an additional need to promote critical reading. They found that some students "lacked the confidence and motivation to trust themselves as writers in the face of seemingly superior texts." In these cases, students preferred not to try and paraphrase and resorted instead to direct quotations. Through practice of critical reading and responding to ideas in a text, we have seen students become more comfortable in using an author's work. This increased comfort could reduce students' reluctance to manipulate the printed word which might otherwise manifest as inappropriate copying.

Pennycook posits an interesting theory that "all language learning is, to some extent, a process of borrowing other people's words" (Pennycook 1996 p. 375, cited in Hyland 2000). Added to the previously highlighted cultural component is the difficulty that some students may not be able to even identify when they are or are not plagiarising (see Deckert 1993). Beaufort (2004, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho 2016) argues that the mental complexity of writing from sources requires extended practice. Clearly, both the conceptual and the mechanical process are needed in building competence in how to use sources. Pecorari and Petrić (2014) contend that pedagogical approaches to reducing plagiarism often take the complementary routes of explicit teaching on academic integrity combined with instruction on source use and referencing. The instructional tool we developed, which we call a 'Reading Journal' used these viewpoints as a design basis and was embedded into the course in order to support these efforts. The Reading Journal aims to try to fill the knowledge and skill gaps that many of our students have by teaching how to navigate textual borrowing what Pecorari & Petrić (2010) identify as an "appropriate integration and documentation of other texts".

THE READING JOURNAL

Our Pre-Master's program is situated at a leading English Medium University in Kazakhstan. The program is aimed to make students better ready for their

future Graduate studies, specifically given the English Medium and Western Higher Education culture. The program spans Academic Reading, Academic Writing, and Academic Communications as well as mathematical content classes. Although critical thinking and academic integrity practices are embedded throughout curriculum, one main area of focus is the Reading Journal, which is an assessed piece of the Academic Reading course. The Reading Journal is an ongoing, formative assessment piece, which requires students to read four texts per week and make an entry into their journal for each text. These entries must include a citation for the text, its main and supporting ideas, and the student's responses to the ideas in the text. The Reading Journal is graded based on completion and quality of entries, and accounts for 30% of a student's Academic Reading grade for the year.

Pecorari and Petrić (2014) highlight several pedagogic approaches to understanding, and thereby reducing, plagiarism. In conjunction with the explicit instruction on academic citing conventions and the identification-of-source practice of the academic texts that our students read, the Reading Journal act to reinforce of many of the skills academics claim are necessary for source use competency.

- Referencing

Inclusion of a one-off lesson on the rules of citation is not uncommon amongst English language learning programs. However, lessons on mechanics, we argue, are essential but not encapsulating. Sustained, mechanical practice with multiple source types is needed for student to gain confidence and competence in citation styles. Cumming, Lai and Cho (2016) report on Beaufort's claim that "mental complexities of writing from sources requires extended practice" (p. 52). We would suggest that it is necessary for training in referencing to be sustained and to contain hands-on-practice. The need for consistent practice and feedback created by the Reading Journal helps students to develop citation skills over the entire course duration.

- Note-taking

When we taught this course for the first time, we noticed that many students were struggling to separate the main idea from the supporting ideas in any given text. We feel that the Reading Journal is an ideal place, therefore, to practice the essential skills of text comprehension and note-taking. We model and scaffold for the students the skills of identifying arguments and writing these in note

form. We agree with many authors, including Pecorari and Petrić (2014, p.288), that effective note-taking, summarising and paraphrasing are the foundational block that allow students to better incorporate sources. The main idea and supporting ideas sections aim to help foster that.

- Idea Ownership

Responding to a text involves a deep understanding of not only what the ideas in the text are, but also positioning oneself as not only a reader but an active participant in the discussion of the idea. The response section of the Reading Journal is designed for students to practice teasing apart what are the author's ideas from what the student thinks about those ideas. It serves a dual function of clarifying ownership as well as developing the confidence to have an opinion on "seemingly superior texts" Hirvel and Du (2013, cited in Cumming, Lai and Cho 2016, p.52). The aim is for this to be the building blocks onto which writer's voice is developed, as well as a way to practice accurate source incorporation.

- Critical Thinking

Other beneficial aspects of the Reading Journal, which were deliberately planned, include developing a students' deeper understanding of their own field through the open choice of texts. Given the wide range of subject mastery that our student population has, having a consistently teacher-driven text choice may hamper a student's interest in, and knowledge of, the area in which they will continue their graduate studies. By giving control to each individual student, we are not only practicing the aforementioned skills, but helping them develop content competency. Beaufort (2004, p.177) contends that "The conceptual model of the knowledge domains in disciplinary writing expertise ... [could] maximize students' opportunities to build subject-matter and critical-thinking expertise, as well as awareness of discourse-community norms."

- Student as Academic

One of the conceptual shifts many of our students face is the change from acting as a *consumer* of knowledge to becoming a *participant* in knowledge development (see Fosnot & Perry, 1996 for a discussion of constructivism in learning), which Graduate study demands. Alumni of our program have reported that the Reading Journal also helped to clarifying reading for them; helped them 'sort out' texts. Several of our alumni reported that they started their own Reading Journals, completely of their own volition, when they started their

Graduate studies. These reactions to the Reading Journal were not part of its original aim, but has been very valuable for the planning of it for current and future inclusion in the Academic Reading syllabus.

CONCLUSION

Time spent developing reading skills and getting students to focus on comprehension of a text as well as their thoughts on a text, is a useful preliminary step before students start writing, and avoids the common pitfall of starting to write without really understanding one's sources. The Reading Journal was developed based on best practice in training students to deal with the key skills, and practice, academic integrity. The design we have described fits the scenarios in which we teach; however, the specifics are flexible enough to be adapted to many different contexts. The theoretical underpinnings on which the Reading Journal rests hopefully make it an attractive tool to help better prepare students for inclusion in an academic sphere.

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