

“Students Make History Every Day Just by Sitting on These Steps”: Performative Spaces and Re-Genring in the South

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Abstract

Students’ call for decolonising the curriculum has triggered deep reflection about what we teach and how we teach it, but equally, about the role of pedagogic spaces in recognising students as agents in their learning. This paper is situated within the field of academic literacies, where students’ engagement with texts is seen as being context-specific, and involving assertions of agency to various degrees. The added dimension here is the embedding of digital literacies, defined as a set of customised online practices, into a writing-intensive, first year, foundational course at a South African university, to favour the acquisition of academic literacies. The analysis of different spaces becomes crucial in grasping how innovative forms teaching and learning may take place. In his trialectics of space, Lefebvre distinguishes between perceived, conceived and lived spaces. Butler would refer to lived spaces as “performative” ones, “congealing” into form through iterative use. Online learning spaces may well turn into performative spaces as students inhabit them, interact with online resources and explore their spatial boundaries. I perform a discourse analysis of students’ textual practices on the online and physical spaces, to explore how students reproduce or subvert genre categories through processes of “re-genring.” Furthermore, I share the extent to which such pedagogic spaces become performative, the power dynamics that emerge, and their effects on our traditional conception of teaching and learning in higher education.

Keywords: online learning; performative spaces; re-genring; writing

The Pedagogical Context

South African universities have been fraught with a number of challenges lately, which in some ways culminated in the student protests from 2015 to date. These protests coincide with student protests in other parts of the world, displaying a global rise in student activism and agency. In South African universities, students called for decolonising the university by removing its

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colonial symbols, and for revisiting what has been perceived as a Eurocentric curriculum. These demands have to some extent pushed academics to re-examine what they teach and how they teach it in ways that are relevant and meaningful. In addition, these demands have urged university academics to reflect on the role of pedagogic spaces in enabling a sense of belonging, and in framing students' learning pathways.

The pedagogic moment selected for this paper traces how first-year students on an introductory course in the Humanities reflect on the spaces they occupy at a South African university, and the role that the shifts in writing genres play in surfacing deep and thoughtful reflections on place as a social construction, place as a text.

In this course, first-year students begin by exploring the reach of texts in the realm of representation. Texts here are broadly defined as socially constructed artefacts (Lea and Street 1998) that are invested with ideological significance, which can be deciphered, interrogated or negotiated. Textual analysis therefore focuses on the meanings of texts in context, the role of pretexts, intertexts and how texts replicate and challenge genres and discourses. By the same token, students are introduced to various ways of producing critical academic texts in traditional learning sites, and on a website, "Critical Writers," custom-made for the course.

While introductory in status, the course is taken in the second semester of students' first year, often in conjunction with other mainstream courses for which it seeks to prepare students. As such, it is likely that, situated in the second semester of their first academic year, the course acts more as a scaffold for the second year rather than retrospectively responding to needs of the first academic year. Thus, the course introduces students to a variety of textual analytical moves that they can rehearse on the course and activate in their liberal arts majors, such as English, Film and Media and History.

The theme of the lecture series is "Representations of Africa." Lectures take place on a Monday and Tuesday, tutorials on a Wednesday and online sessions that reinforce weekly content on a Thursday. In lectures, students access a variety of texts from precolonial to postcolonial times, looking at how Africa is re-packaged into familiar, but also exotic and presumably, stereotypical moulds from within and beyond. In a quasi-reflective move, students also read texts about the representations of Africa, which illuminate the ways in which place, people and their language are depicted, and how presence and absence are constructed to further particular

imperialist visions during precolonial and colonial times. For instance, students are introduced to the writings of Mitchell (1994), who describes precolonial maps as the “dreamwork of the empire,” in other words, a pretext that announces how the blank canvas of the African territory would be appropriated. They then read meta-texts that present or critique the moves made by those who seek to re-claim “authentic” visions of Africa. As such, the prescribed readings are critical in and of themselves. The next step is to encourage students to engage critically with texts about Africa. These could be written texts, visual texts or even spatial texts.

Since students are increasingly visually inclined, and often relate more easily to visual than written modes of delivery, the course opts for the blended approach to teaching, offering a specialised space and time for online activities on the Critical Writers website, alongside traditional lectures and tutorials. The website contains hosts of resources to consolidate lecture material and stretch students’ understanding of weekly prescribed texts and concepts. These take the form of written texts, visual illustrations and videos which students have to analyse closely before answering surface- and deep-level questions in a blog-like fashion. There are also other tasks where they write about research, reflect on their learning or share resources with their peers.

The online site is designed with the following principles in mind: alignment to course content; responsiveness to students’ ongoing queries; creation of a safe space where students can enact different subject positions, practise various genres and enact suitable writer identities; opportunities for peer-learning and self-teaching.

To distinguish between the traditional and the online spaces, the former could roughly be defined as static, bounded and linear, and the latter as dynamic, fluid and hyper-textual in that it opens avenues for an exploration of other related webpages (see also Goodfellow and Lea 2013). When challenging traditional learning spaces, one could argue that lectures cannot be revisited by students unless these are recorded, course readings cannot be updated during the semester unless new readings are added as annexures, and the spatial rules cannot easily be shifted unless students take on a more active participatory role in the classroom. Still, I would refrain from setting these spaces up as clear dichotomies, though online spaces increasingly take on performative functions. Performativity is activated when the rules of participation begin to shift, in Judith Butler’s (1990) sense, when the semantics of space oscillate, and slowly “congeal” into form upon various iterations of use.

I contend that, in contrast to the relatively more static traditional learning spaces, the dynamism of the online platform and tutorials redefines the uptake of writing genre conventions by participants in that space and influences their assertion of voice in their writing.

Performative Spaces

Scholars in the education field, and more specifically language teaching, increasingly use space metaphors to describe their pedagogies as situated teaching and learning practices. In a study on multimodality and multiliteracies in post-apartheid South Africa, Stein and Newfield demonstrate through a series of examples how multimodal pedagogies that make use of visual, written and performance modes restructure the learning space and students' alignment to it in more democratic ways. As the authors "map the terrain" of language pedagogies deployed by creative teachers, they (Stein and Newfield 2006, 11) argue that,

Multimodal pedagogies have the potential to make classrooms more democratic, inclusive spaces in which marginalised students' histories, identities, cultures, languages and discourses can be made visible.

Archer (2006) focuses particularly on the potency of symbolic objects in a "less regulated curriculum space" to enable students with English as an additional language (EAL) to learn experientially through a wider repertoire of resources for expression.

Still, such spaces can be critiqued for their lack of relevance to central institutional spaces. For instance, Bremner and Andrew's design of a multimodal space to engage their students in the objects of their study through "performing the space" or "making their own animated films," needs to be complemented with "explicit writing instruction in English ('overt instruction') and forms of mentoring" so that students may produce "coherent academic essays" (quoted in Stein and Newfield 2006, 11). Any attempt to restrict "marginalised" students to alternative "marginal" spaces may lower their chances of internalising the mainstream institutional discourses, unless these are consciously incorporated in the alternative curriculum.

Scholars like Fleckenstein (1999) postulate that pedagogic practice is situated not only in space but also in the body. The formalisation of knowledge has over time ruptured the ties between the self and the objects of scrutiny. The author seeks to reclaim that link by suggesting that the body is a necessary part of location and practice. The online learning space could be described as a "performative" space. The elements of spatiality and of performativity cannot be separated,

for the workshop space opens up subject positions or roles that cannot be envisaged without first conceiving of a subject. The subject positions are both spatial referents (positions) from where subjects can act and internal(ised) moulds from which participants can explore their multiple writer identities. The moulds can be interpreted differently across settings and individuals as the latter inevitably redefine the boundaries of the former. For this reason, no two roles can be identical even when iterated by the same individual at two points in time; they can at best be different (Derrida 1992).

These theorisations of pedagogic practice as located in the body, or being embodied, speak directly to the ethical imperative of acknowledging who our students are, what experiences they bring to the learning context, the extent to which they find the learning space welcoming or alienating, and the opportunities afforded to them through the mode of writing or more generally text production, to redefine or appropriate the meanings attached to those spaces. Broadly speaking then, the performative space can be seen as an open field for dialogic flows between self, text and context. Over time, these interactions in the workshop space can spiral out to affect the dialogic flows of praxis in the institutional and peer spaces and feed back into theory or design principles.

Critical theorists tend to see the performative space as a “third space” (Bhabha 1994; Gutierrez 2008) or a theoretical alternative to the hegemonic imposition of meanings and ideologies in the mainstream spaces. Critical texts would include Lefebvre’s (1991) writings, where the third space is an alternative site of contestation, inviting questions around the ownership of the means of production. Lefebvre further introduces us to the triad of perceived, conceived and lived spaces. Perceived space is the physical and tangible space, conceived space is the imagined space in the realm of representation, and lived space is the representational and performative one (1991, 39). He elaborates on the latter as follows (Lefebvre 1991, 39):

Representational spaces: space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users.”

Within the postcolonial literary tradition, the third space is one that entertains possibilities for “hybridity” and allows one to move beyond cultural specificities (Bhabha 1994, 4). Bhabha explains that they are not a product of “two original moments from which the third emerges, but gestures to an ambivalent third space of cultural production and reproduction” (1994, 221).

The third space is thus an in-between site where postcolonial meanings and identities are not pre-established but discursively realised after being “appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (1994, 37). Similarly, the Critical Writers site and the tutorial space are conceptualised as performative, third spaces with the aim of possibly enabling deep and reinvigorating engagement with prescribed and alternative readings, in order for students to narrate the story of the situated self without being inhibited by the strictures of academic genre.

Writing Pedagogies: An Overview

Some of the main approaches to teaching writing are the process and genre approaches, and subsequently the academic literacies approach. The process approach suggests that “writing is not the straightforward plan–outline–writing process that many believe it to be” (Taylor 1981, 6). Raimes (1983) and Zamel (1983) view writing as an “exploratory,” “generative process” that allows writers to come closer to the idea they wish to express. Raimes aptly captures this idea as follows: “composing means expressing ideas, conveying meaning” (1983, 261). For Maybin (1994), the process approach treats the teaching of writing as a gradual process that goes through the stages of “drafting, conferencing, revising, editing and publishing,” all carefully scaffolded by the teacher. It aims at fostering students’ authorial voice by giving them the freedom to manoeuvre through their own content. Underlying this approach is the assumption that through practice as well as a layered pedagogy and the teacher’s supportive input at each stage of the writing process, “the craft of writing will come naturally” and good writing will emerge (Maybin 1994). The process approach is however criticised by scholars and proponents of the genre school for not offering explicit writing guidelines to students.

The genre approach, on the other hand, views the teaching of writing as a way of making explicit the underlying principles and conventions of different writing genres (Cope and Kalantzis 1993; Swales 1990). The focus is on the end product, rather than the process. Cope and Kalantzis argue that the process approach may operate in a culturally homogeneous group, but denies students from minority groups access to legitimate texts (1993, 63). They opine that students cannot simply acquire “specialist linguistic structures” but need to be given explicit instructions. Teaching writing through the genre approach involves providing students with and discussing exemplars of the genre required, and helping students to reproduce its features. Unlike the process approach where the teacher has a facilitative role, the teacher here has “strong directional input.” While the genre approach claims to empower students to write in

different genres, it is criticised for being overly prescriptive and hampering students' voice (Badger and White 2000). It may be surmised that while the writing conventions may well become formulaic, their explicitness may give scope for negotiation and subversion.

Still, it appears that regardless of the approach/es used, the end result seems to assimilate the student into the university's writing system. While the process approach may acknowledge elements of students' voices, one wonders to what extent this consideration informs the design of material or the assessment of texts produced over time. It seems that there is still a standard to be met, following several amended drafts, in order to produce a legitimate text. In the case of the genre approach, the pre-eminence of the best model is even more obvious. In all fairness, without a clear target, the students may repeatedly produce texts that are "unacceptable" and rejected by the faculty.

Acknowledging the importance of disciplinary genres, the "academic literacies" approach of the New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement views the teaching of academic writing as more than an indoctrination of skills or genre. It looks at knowledge as situated social practices and the "voices" developed as contingent upon context (Blommaert 2005). This broader view of writing, emerging from Street and Lea's analysis, comes out of the "widening participation" agenda in the United Kingdom (Lillis and Scott 2007). This view of writing would at times call for a "negotiation" of conflicting literary practices or a challenge of the power differentials involved in the transfer of academic writing skills and norms (Lillis and Scott 2007).

Lea and Street's models of academic writing attempt to capture the multi-layered view of writing by describing it under the headings of "study skills," "academic socialisation" and "academic literacies" (Lea and Street 2000, 34). These models show a progression in the conceptualisation of writing over time, but they all still have currency in the present-day higher education system.

The "study skills" model emerges out of the behavioural tradition and views student writing as a set of standard, "atomised" skills students need to master to be called "literate." Insufficient mastery of these skills is regarded as a serious "deficit" or handicap. The second model borrows from social psychology and anthropology and admits that more than skills, students need to be "acculturated" to a specific set of institutional discourses in order to count as literate. What the second model overlooks is the fact that students arrive at the institution with cultural and

academic baggage that needs to be off-loaded, appreciated or rejected before new knowledge is acquired. The third model goes a step further and defines literacies as “social practices ... at the level of epistemology and identities” (Lea and Street 2000, 34) and regards student writing as signs of possible negotiation between one’s voice and the discourses acquired in different learning contexts. They opine that literacy is not reducible to any standard reading and writing skill acquired equally at school by all individuals. Hence, even if students are taught the writing norms in an explicit or process-oriented manner, there is little likelihood that all students would learn and use them in equal and measurable ways. By looking at academic literacies as embedded in social practices beyond the confines of the classroom, one could design writing methods that are more meaningful and relatable to students.

Research Project—“Place as Text”

Before analysing the research task where students produced textual artefacts both online and in traditional spaces, it is important to emphasise that the teaching of writing is not an “atomised” skill, nor does it manifest itself in a vacuum (Lea and Street 2000). Writing is inevitably about something, and in a particular context. In addition to being relevant, in order to captivate the student’s interest and elicit genuine interaction, the topic also needs to be relatable.

As such, the topic was carefully chosen in line with the lecture series on “place as a text.” Students were asked to select a building or monument at the university and analyse how the “place” as a socio-historical text has evolved over time. They were given two weeks to work in groups of five and create a poster around the representations of this building or monument. At the end of the two weeks, they needed to submit their group poster and a short research report written individually. The latter was assessed for marks.

To support them in their research venture, students were provided with the following readings: *Intertextuality* by Bock and Thesen (2004), and a chapter of *Caliban’s Voice* by Ashcroft (2009). Lectures were offered on intertextuality, space versus place, and modelling of place analysis by placing the representations of the university Sports Centre under scrutiny. In the tutorials, they were divided into groups of four and brainstormed ideas around the historical site of their choice and how they would proceed with the research. They were offered special

access to the university's archival resources and provided with a consent form template should they wish to interview other students about the chosen university sites.

On the online platform, students began to rehearse their researcher identities. They were asked to describe the site they would analyse, why they chose that particular site, and the data collection methods they would use. It is noteworthy that, at this point in time, the research report genre had not yet been introduced to students, and yet they were already reflecting on the rationale for the study and the methodology. A lecture on the report genre was only given in the second week, once students had formulated their ideas. This helped them with their final report which counted for marks. In the next section, I detail how each space provides different subject positions for the exploration of genres of writing. It is to be noted that the online and tutorial spaces were interim spaces where students rehearsed writing genres. As such, feedback on such platforms could be formative at best.

Spaces and Genres

The lecture theatre space accommodates approximately 80 students and is usually organised to favour a top-down teaching methodology, which is visibly monological and internalised as such by students. Hence, attempts to flout the spatial codes by lecturers, for instance by posing a question to students or giving them a task to attempt in pairs, are seldom met favourably by students who expect a mode of delivery that is typically unidirectional. Two of the students were hearing impaired and while there was the opportunity for them to ask questions to the lecturer, these were often mediated by their interpreter, and more often than not, were answered by her. This, one could say, is the extent to which the space might constrain the voicing of particular actors.

In terms of content, the Monday lectures often offer a bird's eye view of the historical or sociological context, which situates the theme for the week. The Tuesday lectures tend to be more applied and offer examples of ways of analysing tangible, relatable texts, and being critical of those analytical moves. For instance, in order to explain how "place" operates as a socio-historical text, one of the Tuesday lectures provided an example of the Sports Centre as a "place" whose significance and representations have shifted over time, from being a site of protest during the apartheid era, to an inclusive and business-oriented site that consciously uses the university brand as leverage to secure sponsorship. Students were given other examples, whereby the representations of "place" shifted through the linguistic moves of "re-naming,"

“erasing” and “re-narrating” (Ashcroft 2009), especially in the South African context, and the danger of clinging too heavily to an “authentic” reclaimed story was presented. While the lecture space is quite favourable to model particular approaches to texts, it fares less well when what is sought is a discussion forum to deliberate on the not-so-innocuous constructions of particular texts. When much of the structure of Humanities courses is premised on the ability to read, discuss and write critically about texts and concepts, and given that this is what a foundational language course is required to prepare students for, can lectures really enable students to rehearse different positionalities?

One cannot ignore the situational irony in the fact that an online space hosted remotely on the World Wide Web could potentially bridge the divide between lecturers and students, and between students themselves, in ways not previously enabled by face-to-face, live interactions in lectures or tutorials. The online space in this case is the Critical Writers website where students rehearse different genres of writing in a safe, non-judgmental space. The site was created on WordPress due to its various enabling specifications, but subsequently embedded into the Vula platform, which students use for administrative purposes. The site was embedded so that students do not need to cruise between one platform and another and all online activities are concentrated within a single site. Vula does offer designers a website-generating lesson-builder tool, however, its layout does not allow for complex organisation of content. Hence, the embedding option was adopted.

While students could work on the website at any point in time and wherever they chose, two hours of lab session were specifically booked out every Thursday for website activities. The first hour is compulsory and the second hour is optional. This structure is aligned with the ideal of providing students with a total of five to six hours of contact time per week, including consultations where required. Should students not complete the task in the allotted time, they have until Sunday midnight to complete the task online. A quick glimpse at the “Site Stats” indicate that often students visited the site on a Friday and the majority of students appear online on Sunday evening. What is of significance here is not the fact that students submit tasks at the last minute, but rather that through the website, they were finding the need to revisit lecture content over the weekend before the next lecture set.

The “Writing Tasks” tab contained four sub-pages: “Writing to critique,” where weekly readings and related activities were posted; “Writing to reflect,” where students would think

reflexively about their learning journey and some of the tasks on the course; “Writing about research,” where students drafted their research reports and received feedback from the lecturer; and lastly, “Writing to share,” where students curated interesting resources ranging from journal articles to blogs to TEDTalk videos and those posted widely on Youtube. There was a Gallery page showcasing the best pieces of writing produced by students that served not only as an incentive to students to produce thorough and critical texts, but also served as a semblance of a “model” response to guide and inspire other students. In this manner, each of the pages were interrelated and while some pages contained raw texts produced in a safe space, some pages contained processed texts that were in some ways validated either by the lecturer (e.g. Gallery and Home pages) or validated by the students themselves through comments and popularity counts (e.g. Resources page). In this case, students used the online space to blog about what their research site would be and how they would collect data.

The tutorial space, on the other hand, is normally configured in a round-the-table format with 20 students at most. This set-up is more conducive to discussions, provided that all students participate to some degree. The space is also used to consolidate content, respond to questions and work on application activities. This was the space where students were divided into groups and conceptualised and implemented the material arrangement of textual artefacts on their posters.

However, one did notice at times that when group discussions fizzled, the gazes intensely refocused on the tutor as the purveyor of sacred knowledge. While there was a greater sense of community in the tutorial, it was still characterised by a hierarchy of voices, where the tutor was often the most vocal, followed by a handful of students who have either mastered the content or are confident enough to verbalise their thoughts, followed by a quiet and reflective group of students, who still continued to pay allegiance to the lecture mode. Again, the online platform could assist in providing a non-threatening space for students to express their evolving ideas.

Once students accessed the lecture series and peer support online and in tutorials, they entered a more secluded space where they would produce their final research report. Due to the fact that this was an individual task, they needed to transition from a low-stakes consultative mindset to the high-stakes text production one, which was inevitably for marks. In the later sections, I trace what gets lost or is gained during the transition phases.

Texts Produced

As mentioned, at first, students were asked to blog online about the site of their choice, why it was research-worthy and what methods they would use to collect data. I will present the responses produced by three students. They belonged to two groups which both looked at the representations of Jameson Hall over time.

Group one consisted of four members. In his online draft, Nathan¹ wrote about the iconic Jameson Hall. He shared the spatial coordinates of the Jameson buildings, followed by the ways in which the different uses of Jameson inflect on the meanings of those buildings, and ending with a reflection on how appropriate the name is, given the events surrounding the personality of Leander Starr Jameson. Through this reflection, he echoed Ashcroft's view that places' meanings can later be altered through the processes of re-naming, re-narrating and erasing.

Title: university hotspots and the Jameson character

The place or objects that we are focusing on is The Jameson plaza, The Jameson Hall, The Jameson steps and the Jammie shuttle as they all have something in common. They were named after Leander Starr Jameson. They are all located above university avenue. [...] The Jameson Hall is significant as graduate ceremonies are held there. Because of the history that is associated with Leander Starr Jameson, my argument focuses on why they have changed so many buildings names but not these buildings. Also what The Jameson stairs and hall represent as people's graduate ceremonies are held there.

His team member, Orlando also wrote about the different uses of the Jameson buildings and reflected on what these stand for from a historical perspective and among students today. He spoke of "contrasting histories," the concept of "history" in the plural, to emphasise its socially constructed nature. Through this move, he demonstrated the ability to reflect on historical processes themselves at a meta-cognitive level. He described the site as follows:

The Jameson Character and Its Monuments at university

There are four important aspects of the university of Cape Town that are named Jameson or Jammie, They are: the Jameson Hall, The Jamie Stairs, the Jammie Plaza and the Jammie shuttle. All these have but a vital role that they play to the university and the students. These places and spaces also have different meanings to the students and the university as it represents differing and contrasting histories about the university and the student body. For instance the Jameson hall is where all the university's graduation are held, the Jammie plaza is where most events and demonstrations occur, the Jammie stairs are used as a place where interaction amongst students mostly happens and the Jammie shuttle transports the students in and around the university and from and to their respective student residents and closest places of transportation.

¹ Pseudonyms are used.

After the brainstorming process and data collection, group one produced the following poster (Figure 1).

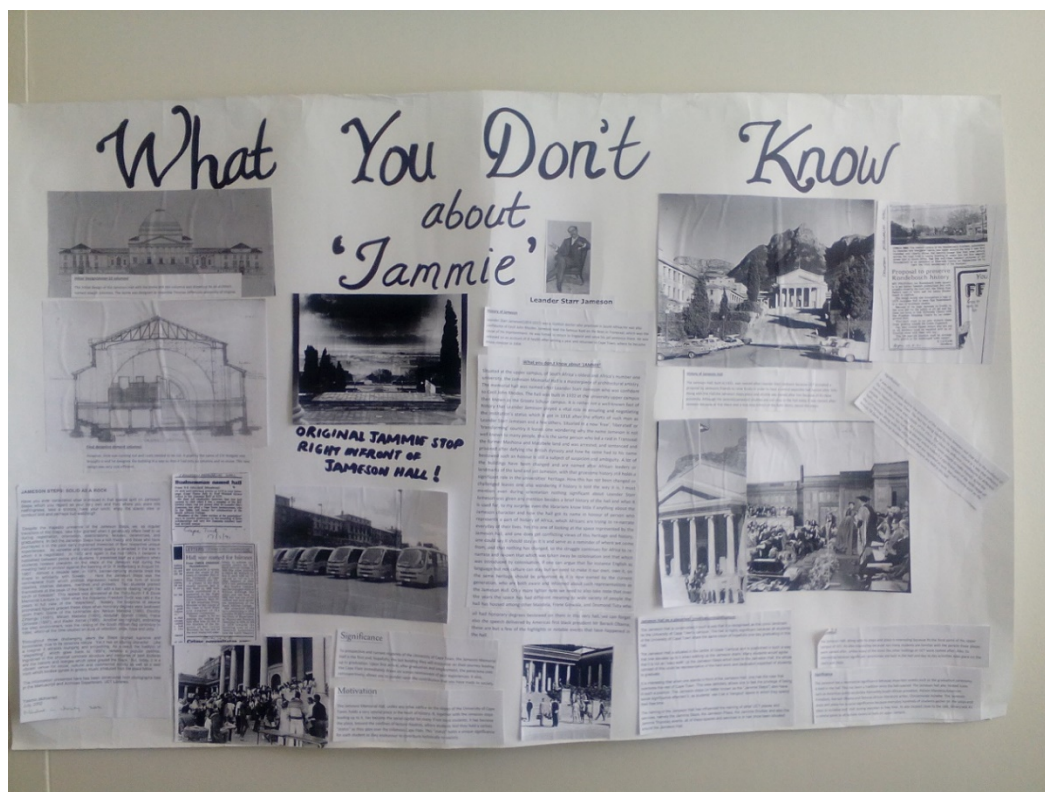


Figure 1: Students' poster: What you don't know about "Jammie"

The group members imagined a captivating title: "What you don't know about 'Jammie.'" Through this, they positioned the viewer as someone who may not be well-informed about the backstory of Jammie and would benefit from reading further. They used the shortened name "Jammie," which is how the university and its students re-appropriated "Jameson," but indicated that behind this veneer of familiarity lie other hidden stories that need to be told. In other words, the poster is not about the uses of Jameson, as described in the online submissions, but rather about the silences and absences. The poster starts with the "rheme," which is "what you don't know about Jammie" and progresses to the "theme," the controversies surrounding Jammie. Hence, they draw the reader in to explore further.

Equally interesting is the fact that, unlike other posters, this poster shows a heavy leaning towards the written versus the visual text. The visual would be the immediately accessible mode, whereas the written, being twice removed, acts as an anchor to situate the images that have lost their links to the place over time and become decontextualised. As such, in this case,

the written text effectively documents the shifts in meanings of Jameson over time, even if the visual aspect of the building has not changed.

Here is a sample of Nathan's and Orlando's final individually produced research reports. I will focus on their argument and findings. Nathan's argument in the final research report was a detailed one:

We found this place interesting because it's a landmark and upon entering upper campus it's one of the first big historical buildings people encounter. Also, important ceremonies are held in the hall, specifically the graduation ceremony and the venue has not changed since the hall was built. Events are held on the plaza at the bottom of the steps and we see how students socialize when partaking in these events. Every day during meridian and during their free time, hundreds of students gather on the Jammie (Jameson) steps to socialize, interact and relax. Although these are all positive things tied to the Jameson hall one could now ask why has the buildings name not been changed to something South Africans can positively relate to in order to move on as Jameson was part of the British colonizers. We could also argue that many people don't know the history of the Jameson hall and students have made new history in connection to this hall so it would make no difference to change it.

Not only does Nathan describe the different uses of Jameson, but he also supposes that the building's name has not changed despite historical facts around the personality of Jameson, because people are not sufficiently informed of their history and the ethical dissonance that underlies the naming of Jameson Hall as such. At this point, upon interviewing students, he found the name change option of little consequence.

In the findings section, Nathan expressed the view that there was "no real influence" of Jameson on the history of South Africa and compares him to other leaders such as Nelson Mandela. In this manner, the act of writing about historical figures operates in ways to downplay and erase their influence, rather than give them more importance. In fact, the writing space soon becomes occupied by other personalities whom Nathan thinks would be more worthy of being glorified and re-written into being. The writing space hence becomes a platform for presencing and erasing individuals in students' re-narrations of place.

Although Nelson Mandela was also imprisoned unlike Jameson he fought for the citizens of South Africa. Jameson however, fought against citizens of South Africa for the benefits of himself, Cecil John Rhodes and other colonizers in South Africa. He has no historical influence on university, other than helping university gain university status yet he gets four objects/places named after him. Yes it was only right that these objects/places be named after him then, as university accepted the proposal. However so many places names have been changed to activists that South Africa can relate to so why not this building's name?

Nathan draws on the material from the poster to reveal Jameson's morally reprehensible actions, and the uncomfortable link between his status and his actions. Comparing Jameson to Nelson Mandela, Nathan at this stage calls for a change of name. Thus, the report captures the discursive process Nathan is involved in as he attempts to reconcile past contradictions and the present historical blinkers among students.

He still acknowledged the productive force of history when he suggested that, "We make our own history."

Perhaps the buildings names were not changed because people don't know the real history so it would not make a difference. Students are also so familiar with these places and the name Jameson does not even feature because students have shortened them to Jammie instead of Jameson. So in essence the name is not officially changed but it is socially changed. Although the building does not have a historical significance with the person it's named after it does have a historical significance with students. Students make history everyday just by sitting on these steps; they make new friendships and form new bonds. They make history by writing examinations in the Jameson Hall. History is made when they traditionally graduate in this hall. This hall has hosted historical icons such as Nelson Mandela, Bobby Kennedy, Barrack Obama and Chimamanda Adichie.

He reflected on the process of historicisation as a performative rather than static act, reinforced through everyday mundane acts, which is a new insertion to the ideas expressed in the online draft and poster. He suggests that though people have undergone some form of historical amnesia, which is why they have not stood up against the name, they re-appropriated the name, and re-narrated it by using the site to different ends. In this, his words resonate with those of Bhabha (1994) that the people "re-historicise" the place.

In contrast to Nathan's negative depiction of Jameson, Orlando's argument at the beginning of his final report read as follows:

It is rather not a well-known fact of history that Leander Jameson played a vital role in ensuring and negotiating the institution's status which it got in 1918 after the efforts of such man as Leander Starr Jameson and a few others.

In acknowledging this contribution, Orlando did not question Leander Jameson's legitimacy to pose as an iconic figure at the university. Thus, he did not follow through with the argument put across in the online draft. Still, in the findings section, Orlando showed that he was perplexed by the fact that Jameson's unethical activities were not well-known by many.

Situated in a now “free”, “liberated” or “transforming” country it leaves one wondering why the name Jameson is not well known to many people, this is the same person who led a raid in Transvaal the former Mashona and Matebele land and was arrested, and sentenced and prisoned after defying the British dynasty and how he had to his name bestowed such an honour is still a subject of suspicion and ambiguity. How this has not been changed or challenged leaves one also wondering if history is told the way it is [...] Yes this one of looking at the space represented by the Jameson hall, and one does get conflicting views of this heritage and history, one could say it should stay as it is and serve as a reminder of where we come from, and that nothing has changed, so the struggle continues for Africa to re-narrate and re-own that which was taken away by colonisation and that which was introduced by colonisation, if one can argue that for instance English as language but not culture can stay but we need to make it our own, own it, on the same heritage should be preserved as it is now owned by the current generation, who are both aware and informed about such representations as the Jameson Hall. On a more lighter note we need to also take note that over the years the space has had different meaning to wide variety of people the hall has housed among other Mandela, Frene Ginwala, and Desmond Tutu who all had honorary degrees bestowed on them in this very hall, we can forget also the speech delivered by America’s first black president Mr Barack Obama, these are but a few of the highlights or notable events that have happened in the hall.

He started off by describing the unsavoury details about Jameson’s activities. Then, like Nathan, he questioned the process of historicisation and how the ways of narrating affect what is told. He then spoke about the absences, taking a strong stance: “I must mention that even during orientation nothing significant about Leander Starr Jameson was given any mention besides a brief history...” Though he admits the ethical contradiction embodied by the place, he does not advocate renaming, unlike his group member, Nathan. His argument features at the end of his report, perhaps because he was still reasoning through it, and using writing to scaffold the thinking process. He argued, “we need to make it our own, own it, on the same heritage should be preserved as it is now owned by the current generation.” As such, he was in favour of re-narrating place through its new uses, rather than a change of name.

Group two, consisting of four members as well, also wrote about the representations of Jameson Hall. Here is Ingrid’s draft on the course website:

“Jameson Hall”

Jameson Hall is a centre of the building at university upper campus. My group have discussed and made an agreement to choose that building. We find it interesting and wonder why it’s on the “middle” between other buildings even though, I always find many students sit on the jammie steps by the Jameson Hall (especially meridian, it’s always hectic.) We didn’t know that there are 101 steps on the jammie steps by Jameson Hall. [...] The arguments are what are the reasons why these special events taking place at Jameson Hall as a representation of that building, why the representation has to be the “centre” building at the campus—will research for the history about how it had started. My group will visit that building and find out about it. My group will work together for the research—visiting Jameson Hall, taking photos, making reports, research on university Library search (books and websites) and collect interview data from some students/staffs who have been there for more than three years or long experiences (the consent forms are provided and signed by them for their permission). I will get an A1

paper, some materials to make creative on the poster and collect data from university library websites.

Ingrid began by describing the physical coordinates of the place, the events that took place there, and questioned the centrality of the place in terms of location and significance.

Their poster (Figure 2) displayed signs of thorough research and data processing.

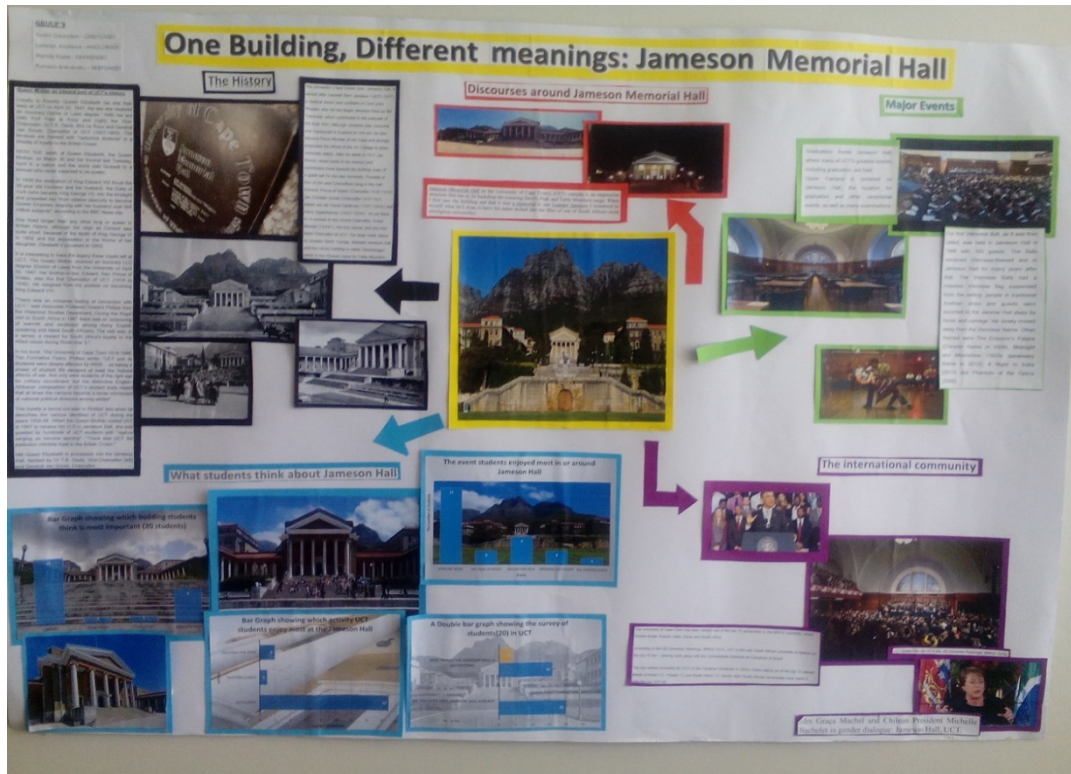


Figure 2: Students’ poster: One building, different meanings

The poster struck a fine balance between images, written text and charts. The title, “One building, different meanings” started with the “theme,” followed by the “rheme,” that is, from the familiar to the new information. It provided a historical overview of the building, discourses around the building, major events, and most interestingly, charts illustrating what students thought of the building in terms of 1) the building students thought was the most important, where Jameson Hall featured second after the library; 2) the activities students enjoyed the most at Jameson Hall, which was socialising over and above enjoying the view and having lunch; 3) the events students enjoyed the most around Jameson Hall, which was African Week; and finally 4) who thinks Jameson Hall is interesting, where 75 per cent responded in the affirmative. These charts indicated how the site was used and re-appropriated by students.

In her final report, Ingrid's introduction was as follows:

This report will discuss Jameson Hall which my group and I find as a fascinating building. The location of Jameson Hall is the centre of university at upper campus. This report will explore how it started and what it represents in the present day. The hall is mostly used for presenting of major events, international community events, and for the use of many students who surround it during meridian. This report also questions the discourse around Jameson Hall. Is it important for the representation of university? Why does it have to be at Jameson Hall? This building is a great analysis point for the representation of the university.

She ended the paragraph with a series of questions, and in her argument the centrality of Jameson Hall, as expressed in the online draft, was less evident.

Her findings were that Jameson Hall had acquired new meanings through its multiple uses.

In more recent years, university has hosted many major events which have made the students consider Jameson Hall area as an entertainment area, like African week, Career Expo, SRC, ball dancing, etc. The orientation week at the beginning of year and the graduation in the middle and at the end of the year are held at Jameson Hall. Also university welcomes international community to attend events at Jameson Hall, such as Barack Obama, Michelle Bachelet, and Graca Machel. The Hall is used for tests and examinations. This building is the representation of an important place where we and even VIPs can come to the centre of the university and see the beautiful view behind and in front of the hall.

In addition, interviews with students take place in front of the hall, and students mostly enjoy socialising around Jameson Hall, and they explore inside the building as well and they find it extraordinary. They feel it is easy for them to meet up by the middle between the buildings, and sit on the hall's exterior 101 steps.

While Ingrid did not question the centrality of Jameson Hall, or students' perceptions of its centrality as she had depicted in graphs in the poster, she described the events that took place in Jameson Hall with the key focus on its multiple uses today, rather than how these jarred with past colonial happenings.

Texts in Discord

At times, one notices a clear progression in students' ideas and assertion of voice, especially across the different genres of texts. At other times, some ideas get obscured in the transitional process.

In his blog, Nathan covered the following points: the spatial coordinates of Jameson, the building's uses and the controversy around its name. In the poster, he only addressed the controversy and the silences in its representations. However, in the report, he integrated all pieces of information into a coherent whole, adding a final component about the process of rehistoricisation and the need to rename the site. In terms of the affordance of genres, while the

poster allowed him to map his thoughts and piece together different aspects of representation, the report, by virtue of its formal academic character, allowed him to summarise and connect disparate ideas, and to theorise about ideas. In other words, the report allowed him to move to a higher level of abstraction, which may not have been possible with the poster, unless he had seen it as a tool for visual argumentation.

In Orlando's online task, the different uses of Jameson Hall were covered, the fact that history is a construct, and the controversy surrounding Jameson. The poster only covered the controversy and the silences. Still, the report incorporated all these ideas, including a section about rehistoricising place and the need to keep the name so that students continue to critically engage with this representation of place. Once again, the report allowed Orlando to draw from the literature on place and theorise about re-narrations of place.

In Ingrid's texts, more alterations took place as she moved from one textual genre to another. In the online task, she spoke of the centrality of Jameson Hall in terms of location and importance. In the poster, the idea of centrality was reinforced through students' perceptions of place and the events that took place there. The history section also suggested the controversy around Jameson, which could have been used more strongly to challenge the significance attributed to Jameson Hall. In the report, she detailed how Jameson featured at the centre of campus, the events that took place there, and students' perceptions of the site. However, the discussion of its centrality in terms of importance and the controversy around Jameson was forgotten along the way.

Interestingly, even as the ideas shifted across the writing contexts, students' assertion of voice, or the responsibility they took for ideas expressed became more evident. By the time they were writing the report, they were doing the equivalent of a third draft. The final report retained the creative titles of the posters, the pertinent questions posed in the online blog, and statements with high modality, such as, "I *must* mention even during orientation," "heritage *should* be preserved," "yes it is *only* right that," and "*we* make our own history." Had students attempted the report without the priming tasks, one wonders whether students would have presented more conventional titles or made attempts at being "objective" and "academic" at the expense of being creative?

The Power of Invisibility

The various writing contexts appear with their own stakes and affordances, some notably with the power of invisibility. For instance, in the online task, the “comments” feature makes the students more audible than in a tutorial context, and yet less visible. In addition, it brings in its stride the awareness of a wider audience, that is, 80 peers as opposed to two lecturers who might already have some historical awareness about the sites.

This possibility of being audible yet invisible offers students the sense of being in a blogging environment, which mirrors the collaborative format of social networking sites. In a focus-group session conducted at the end of the course, most students reported that they learnt much from their peers, even if no one was evidently performing the teacher role in that context. They were constantly in a state of conspicuous consumption, inevitably reading other students’ writings, not necessarily realising how their own writing was shaping other students’ opinions. It was observed that the blogging genre, with invisibility enabled, began to supersede and at times intermesh with the other genres, be it the academic writing or report-writing genre, to create more liberated versions of the latter.

The posters were brainstormed in the tutorial, however they were created outside that space, at students’ own convenience. As such, tutors only saw the end product once submitted. By then, the poster text had once more become faceless. Later, students were asked if their posters could be exhibited at the university’s Teaching and Learning Conference. They agreed, though they promptly stated that they would not wish to stand beside the posters. They preferred the idea that their texts would speak on their behalf. It is not surprising that the awareness that they could be anonymised through their work made them more creative and willing to take risks in some instances. Students opted for colourful boards and displays, some posters experimented with font styles and some even had stars, which would be reminiscent of high school poster activities.

The final task differed in terms of visibility and stakes. Though it was read by the tutor in absentia, it was a high-stakes task, with the tutor being more likely to associate the student’s name with his previous tasks, track record and class participation. As such, the style was more cautious and guarded. That said, having experimented with more liberating subject positions and voice prior to the final task, students were seen to re-insert that voice into what could otherwise be a visibly more restrictive writing context with legitimate ways of speaking.

Reflections on Genre

Reflecting on the research project, most students found it interesting, as indicated by this clicker activity (Figure 3). Genre concerns around methodology and findings were peripheral to the value that the activity added to students' learning experience.



Figure 3: Wordle of students' impressions of the research task

One wonders whether students would have expressed such interest had the report-writing genre conventions been introduced early in the lecture series. This leads us to reflect on writing pedagogies themselves and how they influence students' critical engagement with texts.

In terms of designing teaching methodologies, the view of academic writing from the academic literacies purview brings its own challenges. For instance, with the cross-over between disciplines, the academic writing genre itself becomes hard to define. Therefore, even during the design phase, one needs to step back to review the text production norms of the discipline. In her recent chapter, Lea (2012, 109) recommends that,

In facing this challenge both researchers and practitioners will need to focus the literacies lens more tightly on micro-practices and, at the same time, widen the lens to pay more attention to the institutional practices that are implicated in the emergence of new genres, both in and outside the academy.

In this landscape of genre instability, others also see opportunities and attempt to subvert the genre delimitations further by teaching more embodied forms of academic writing, acknowledging that genres are not static. Schryer (1993) in fact describes genres as social

actions that are “stabilised-for-now” but likely to change. Creme (2008) explores the transitional genres between personal narratives and academic writing forms, perhaps in a less essentialised way than Elbow (1998), who believes that individual thinking in academic writing can be boosted by asking students to write in non-academic forms. More recently, English (2012) looks at what she has coined as “regenring” and the affordances of different genres for writing and knowledge. The experimentation with genre is in keeping with the academic literacies thrust which focuses on agency within and over and above structure. Based on her teaching experience, English suggests that “regenring” moves can allow “for different kinds of responses and ways of relating to academic knowledge,” if of course, the gatekeeping structures allow them to occur (2012, 207). This was evident in the research as students took ownership of their statements and wrote confidently with modals reflecting strong alignment to truth, such as “should” and “must.”

This is an area where educationists are able to harness the learning sites, and make conscious choices about the tasks they design and forms of assessment. One notices that formal assessment may stifle voice if students are not provided with interim sites, with low-stakes tasks, in more relatable genres, where they can occupy and perform new subject positions, as bloggers and researchers, to express their evolving views more freely. To use Lefebvre’s triad, such interim sites would be “lived spaces” where students act, rather than are acted upon, and where they reconfigure their relationship to those spaces by participating in them.

Conclusion

The movement of textual practices across learning sites offers insight into students’ assertion of voice and their textual choices. The learning sites themselves, in terms of Lefebvre’s triad, become increasingly performative and embodied as students begin to inhabit them (1991, 38).

In terms of the task assigned to students, the notion of place and one’s location in it becomes their object of scrutiny, as they conduct research on the university buildings that surround them. Here, learning becomes visual, tactile, but also allows for temporal oscillations, as students move from the observation of their chosen building to its past representations in dusty archival documents. Then, as the task becomes formalised into a report, as the space narrows down to the intimacy between self, the computer and a written product assessed for marks, the learning space as the lived space takes on a different significance. At times, there may be deletions and

attempts at sanitising the text of the human experience of inhabiting it; at times, the enthusiasm attached with meaning-making may be sustained and imported into the formalised context.

Tracing the texts produced by the three students on the academic literacy course, the article illustrates the types of re-genring that occurred and how these enabled students to occupy different subject positions and gradually develop stronger assertions of voice. What could possibly be added to the lecture series is a session on visual argument, so that the poster task may be evaluated for the strength of the visual claim made. This time, it served as a pretext for developing more sophisticated arguments around the representations of place. Whichever route one adopts, as Blommaert (2005) would argue, it is useful to analyse the uptake of ideas across texts and spaces and how, in this case, moments of re-genring allowed for more self-assured displays of students' writer identities.

In light of students' call for decolonising the curriculum, the research brings to the fore possible ways of looking beyond traditional learning sites, in attempts to elicit critical engagement with academic texts and concepts in the disciplines. It also suggests that these alternative sites, online and face-to-face, could potentially generate novel forms of writing, encourage diverse perspectives, and play a part in promoting social justice and transformation, especially given the current climate where some students may feel silenced by mainstream academic spaces. By exploring the synergies and discontinuities as student texts travel across these different sites, one may be in a better position to understand the students themselves, and how spaces, genres and moments of re-genring can liberate voice in academic writing, whichever shape it might assume.

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