The Place of Theory in Academic Writing

Questions for discussion:

- In what ways, if any, do the tensions between pragmatism and activism resonate in a Norwegian/Nordic context?
- What is the place of theory in your practice?
- Are there institutional structures or expectations that complicate our engagement with theory?

References

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Akademisk skriving og dialogisk rettleiiing i høgare utdanning
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http://www.hioa.no/LSB/EAP
- NMBU Writing Centre
- Akademisk skrivesenter ved Universitetet i Bergen (Humanistisk fakultet)
- Studieverkstedet, MIPP og EAP, Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus
- Studieverkstedet ved Universitetet i Stavanger
- Skrivesenteret AL ved Høgskolen i Bergen (lærerutdanningen)
- Senter for Faglig kommunikasjon i utdanning og arbeidsliv, SEFAK ved NTNU
- English Writing Centre, Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, UiT
- Akademisk skrivesenter, UiO
- Others.... ?
"Matnyttig"
What is theory in academic writing?

Others?
Some combination of these?

Linguistics/applied linguistics/sociolinguistics (e.g. Swales)

Education (socio-cultural theory, literacy, language in context, e.g. Dysthe)

Rhetoric/composition (multi-field, ad-hoc, draws on social sciences, humanities, rhetoric, discourse analysis, e.g. Bazerman)

Sociology of knowledge (social theory, anthropology, philosophy of science e.g. Knorr Cetina)

Critical theory/literary theory (post-structuralist theory, feminist theory, queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, post-colonial theory e.g. Foucault)
"critical theory as problematizing practice"
(Pennycook, 1999, 341)

Bhabha, Bourdieu, de Certeau, Foucault, Said, Spivak, Butler, Freire, Hall, hooks, etc.
"always turning a skeptical eye towards assumptions, ideas that have become naturalized, notions that are no longer questioned" (Pennycook, 1999, 343)
Barnard's (2014) critique of US Rhetoric/Composition (L1)

"growing lag between theory and pedagogy"
Barnard (2014), 1

"...templates of the writing process as predictable, consistent and repeatable are not only dishonest but damaging to student writers." Barnard (2014)
"growing lag between theory and pedagogy"

Barnard (2014), 1
Uses critical theory to interrogate concepts like "clarity", "intent", "voice", "audience," "objectivity" and others.
"impel compositionists to think of clarity itself as a problem" (31)

One effect of the the imperative of "clear" writing is that "students become eager to judge all writing - both peer and professional - based on how easy it is to read. (....) Not understanding becomes a position of power from which to attack the text (Culler and Lamb 2003a)" (33).
“...templates of the writing process as predictable, consistent and repeatable are not only dishonest but damaging to student writers”  Barnard, 155
Benesch's (2001) critique of English for Academic Purposes (L2)

EAP's focus: "provide the maximum possible support in the limited time available."

Dudley-Evans in foreword, ix

"ideology of pragmatism"  "discourses of neutrality"

Benesch, "experiments" of critical EAP practice:
- gender, race, class, social justice as explicit themes in EAP work
- EAP teacher as activist in linked courses: "help students channel their resistance into proposals and actions to improve conditions" (119)

EAP practitioner as activist
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EAP practitioner as activist
Critique of the critique

"Ideologist discourse" with a colonizing effect
Allison, 1994

"Writing teachers are not the unthinking instruments of the status quo which some suggest. On the contrary, rather than simply brainwashing students into accepting the inevitable superiority of valued genres, providing learners with greater understanding of and access to them is a key aspect of demystifying such genres"
- Hyland, 2016, 166
"Ideologist discourse" with a colonizing effect

Allison, 1994
“writing teachers are not the unthinking instruments of the status quo which some suggest. On the contrary, rather than simply brainwashing students into accepting the inevitable superiority of valued genres, providing learners with greater understanding of and access to them is a key aspect of demystifying such genres”

- Hyland, 2016, 166
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References


