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# Academic writing re-designed: Connecting languages and literacy in the assemblage of EAP

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## Abstract

*This study draws on the combined perspectives of “A pedagogy of multiliteracies” (New London Group, 1996) and assemblage and affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) to examine how neoliberal identities shape how English for academic purposes (EAP) students compose a source-based research paper. Such exploration is necessary to account for the range of influences that contribute to students’ meaning making and textual production, especially when academic dishonesty is involved. Interview data from one atypical student participant is presented and analyzed through the post-qualitative method of rhizoanalysis to highlight how (mis)intended meaning in the design process can be (mis)interpreted. Analysis from a pedagogy of multiliteracies framework combined with assemblage and affect reveal the unsuspecting neoliberal influence that shape learning experiences in EAP. Based on these findings, critical implications for EAP pedagogy and research are proposed to address international students’ lived realities as digital-transnational citizens.*

*Key words: multiliteracies, assemblage, affect, EAP, neoliberalism*

## Résumé

*Cet article combine la perspective de la pédagogie des littératies multiples (New London Group, 1996) aux concepts d’agencement et d’affect (Deleuze et Guattari, 1980/1987) afin d’examiner comment les identités libérales façonnent la manière dont les étudiants d’un programme d’anglais à des fins académiques (EAP) composent un essai en s’appuyant sur des sources documentaires. On y parcourt les influences qui contribuent à la construction du sens dans leur production textuelle, notamment en matière de malhonnêteté académique. Des données recueillies lors d’entretiens avec une étudiante plutôt atypique sont présentées suivant la méthode post-qualitative de l’analyse rhizomatique pour montrer comment le sens (non)-voulu se dégageant du processus de conception peut être (mal)-interprété. L’analyse du cadre de la pédagogie des littératies multiples, combinée aux concepts deleuziens, révèle une influence néolibérale insoupçonnée dans l’expérience d’apprentissage des étudiants. En*

*ressortent les implications critiques pour la pédagogie et la recherche en matière d'EAP, a priori les réalités vécues par les étudiants étrangers comme citoyens numériques-transnationaux.*

*Mots-clés : littératies multiples, agencement, affect, enseignement de l'anglais à des fins académiques (EAP), néolibéralisme*

## ***Introduction***

This article connects the New London Group's (NLG, 1996) "A pedagogy of multiliteracies" (PoM) with the Deleuzian concepts of assemblage and affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987) to explore the literacy practices of international students in an English for academic purposes (EAP) program from the perspective of neoliberal higher education. To do this, I draw on data collected as part of a larger project on the intersections of technology and plagiarism in second language (L2) writing in an EAP program and focus on the interview data from one participant, W.A.,<sup>1</sup> an international student from China, who demonstrated an uncanny ability to draw from available resources to design, and (be) redesign(ed) in the process of writing a research paper. Analysis focuses on the atypical nature of the participant's explanation for academic misconduct. W.A.'s experience writing the research paper arguably exceeds conventional interpretation and the design framework proposed by PoM, and further exploration into W.A.'s meaning-making and intended design is warranted given the consequences that allegations of misconduct bare on students' academic identities and trajectories.

The inexplicability of W.A.'s data is ripe for analysis through the concepts of assemblage and affect, concepts that can account for the broader context in which language learning takes place. This includes more than the socio-cultural norms and assumptions that students and teachers bring to the classroom but also the material conditions and affective capacities such as the economy of global English language learning and international students desire as language learners<sup>2</sup> (Motha & Lin, 2014). If we accept that language learning

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<sup>1</sup>The participant selected the pseudonym "Woody Allen." For brevity, the participant will be referred to herein as W.A.

<sup>2</sup>Desire, here, does not refer to Deleuzian desire defined not by lack or wanting but an energy that exceeds individual consciousness or intention (Deleuze, 2002/2004). Here, I imply Motha and Lin's (2014) conceptualization of language learner desire which is interconnected with other desires: desires of communities, desires of teachers, desires of institutions and desires of states and governments in global English. Within this framework of multiple desires operating in English in language learning is the commodification of language and the belief that English credentials will bring the individual learner greater opportunity.

(Toohey, 2019) and academic writing (Yancy & McElroy, 2017) are dynamic and multilayered processes, then it is necessary to expand our view of EAP literacy practices to include possible neoliberal ideologies and identities. In other words, as researchers, we must draw attention to what is not readily apparent when working with a traditional humanistic lens and phenomenological interpretation through PoM alone (Smith, 2016).

### ***Literature review:***

#### ***Neoliberal EAP curriculum in Canadian universities***

Over the past 15 years, Canadian universities have experienced a growth in EAP bridging programs which are designed to facilitate the transition of international students into higher education institutions through conditional admission (Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). Also known as pathway programs, EAP bridging programs focus on the English language skills required to develop linguistic and academic skills and the communicative behaviours associated with academic settings (Hyland & Hamps-Lyon, 2002; Leki & Carson, 1997). Successful completion of the program allows students entry into degree-bearing programs. Research on the effectiveness of EAP programs and instruction in Canada is extensive (e.g., Fox et al. 2014). Less prominent are critical approaches towards developing students' awareness of the power relations in language education including neoliberalism in higher education (Benesch, 2009; Chun 2009, 2015). This gap in the research warrants further scrutiny given growing recognition of EAP programs as sites of neoliberal ideologies and practices (Ding & Bruce, 2017; Hadley, 2015; Litzenberg, 2020).

Neoliberalism in language education is still a relatively new area of interest, but one of growing interest for critical applied linguistics (e.g., Block et al., 2012). Defining the term *neoliberalism*, especially in language education is contentious (Chun, 2016), but for the purpose of this study, Kubota's (2016) definition of neoliberalism (in language education) offers an operational understanding as,

an ideological and structural apparatus that promotes a free-market economy by privatizing public services, creating a flexible workforce, and increasing individual and institutional accountability for economic success, while reducing social services and producing disparities between the rich and the poor. With global capitalism, neoliberalism supports economic activities across national borders. (p. 485)

With neoliberalism, language is commodified (Duchêne & Heller, 2012), and this commodification plays out in university affiliated EAP programs that offer English language training to (mostly) international students seeking admission to western anglophone universities. As revenue-generating units within the

university, EAP programs have silently become the “epicenter of neoliberal linguistic commodification” (Litzenberg, 2020, p. 822), a process of revenue generation through the exchange of a service (international education) for market-determined fees. Here, neoliberalism is operationalized through tuition for linguistic capital, or what Chun (2009) calls the mobilization of linguistic resource where international students believe in the ideology of English as a resource for accessing higher education and achieving greater career opportunities. In other words, EAP programs “create a set of academic objects that become viewed by consumers as a means of increasing their human-capital” (Litzenberg, 2020, p. 826). As such, the teaching and learning of academic writing operates as tool in the reproduction of neoliberal order, and students become consumers of knowledge as a product that promises future professional return (Neculai, 2015).

Chun (2009, 2015, 2016) has long warned of how neoliberal ideologies circulate in EAP programs from the recruitment methods and materials that target wealthier populations to the student-educator relationship that more resembles service-provider and customer. Given the inflated tuition rates (Chun, 2009), admission into EAP programs is typically restricted to the select few who Vandrick (1995), in her earlier work, characterized as the “privileged international student” (p. 375). For international students, as opposed to immigrant newcomers who may be receiving government subsidized tuition, attending and successfully completing an EAP program could be considered as a sign of being “elite” rather than an intellectual or academic accomplishment (Chun, 2009).

Scholars have explored how neoliberalism influences EAP program operations and curricula; however, there is little research into how neoliberal ideologies and identities impact students’ textual production especially related to technical aspects of academic literacies such as source-based writing and research-paper writing. Arguably, the lack of literature is not surprising. As Hamps-Lyons (2015), the long-time editor of the *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* remarked

[t]he overt use of the international student ‘market’ by governments to shore up the finances of universities is an embarrassment to many of us, and is discussed in small fora and face to face among EAP teachers and programme managers, but is not found in the research literature. (p. A2)

Given the centrality of source-based writing as a skillset fundamental for academic success (Grabe & Zhang, 2013) and the stigma associated with transgressive writing, plus the absence of research of how neoliberalism in EAP might contribute to students’ textual production, further inquiry is warranted.

A central component of EAP curriculum is to teach students the genre-specific task of academic source-based writing. Writing from sources focuses

on the literacy sub-skills of summarizing, paraphrasing and synthesizing the ideas of other authors into their own written work (Zhao & Hirvela, 2015). Source-based academic writing is notoriously challenging for students working in an additional language (Currie, 1998; Shi, 2006; Storch, 2009) as it requires advance linguistic proficiency as well as analytic skill to find, select, reproduce and integrate existing ideas to the specifications of the writing task (Pecorari, 2015).

The foci assignment in this study is a research paper, a genre of academic writing that entails prolonged engagement with digital tools. In research paper writing, students are required to select a research topic, use online search engines to find appropriate source information, engage in extensive reading of digital texts, select relevant supporting evidence and form a lengthy yet cohesive line of argumentation that synthesizes existing knowledge. Source-based writing, research paper writing and plagiarism-avoidance are typically part of the EAP curriculum and are formally taught in-class. In addition, L2 students' writing practices may also be influenced by prior knowledge and outside-of-class social practices. For this reason, PoM, which emphasizes the wide range of influences that contribute to meaning-making in textual production, is relevant to this study.

### ***Theoretical framework: “A pedagogy of multiliteracies” revisited***

#### **“A pedagogy of multiliteracies”**

Since its inception, PoM (NLG, 1996) has enjoyed widespread acceptance, being taken up internationally to arguably become “the central manifesto of the new literacies movement” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 23). PoM reconceptualizes literacy as plural (literacies) with two multi dimensions, the multilingual and the multimodal (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Multiliteracies broadens literacy practices to include how students work across languages, mediums and modalities to produce and consume texts, and form meaning. Central to PoM is the premise that each learner brings to the classroom their own unique real-life experiences, academic and cognitive abilities, socio-cultural and linguistic resources, educational interests, motivations and needs (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Literacies, including academic literacies, are social practices, socially, culturally and politically, situated (Street, 1995) and start “from the local, everyday experience of literacy in particular communities of practice (Hamilton & Barton, 2000, p. 379). This extended view of literacy allows for consideration of ideologies, identities, dispositions and subjectivities that inform students' meaning-making and textual production through three dimensions: available design, designing and the redesigned.

Available design refers to the resources from which meaning emerges.

This domain is intentionally vague to include the texts, language, patterns, conventions, culture and context and systems that learners draw upon “to develop strategies for reading the new and unfamiliar, in whatever form these may manifest themselves” (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 177). The openness of the available design is conducive to exploring the range of possible outside-of-class influences that shape meaning-making in L2 digitally mediated source-based writing. Designing is the act of doing something with available design, that is, producing new meaning that is communicated to others via writing, speaking, drawing, moving, making and so forth.

New designs are representative of learners’ subjectivity, identity, and voice. In this study, new designs are drafts of students’ work submitted to the instructor for feedback. The research paper assignment involved several stages and a continual process of production, feedback and revision before a student could move onto the next stage of the assignment. In each stage of the writing process, the interaction between available resources-student-textual production provides the opportunity for creativity in new design. Likewise, in each round of student-text-instructor-feedback, there is the opportunity to be re-designed. For example, a good student might be re-designed as a transgressive student if plagiarism is found in their work.

Over a decade ago, PoM foresaw the expansion of multinational enterprise and the emergence of educational policy and practices reflective of market forces (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), and in response, the notion of literacy was re-conceptualization to account for the “new economy” and “knowledge society” (p. 168). Despite the prophetic vision “to develop a literacy pedagogy which will work pragmatically for the ‘new economy’ ” (p. 169), times continue to change and “modern-day multiliteracies are far more layered and variegated than the original manifesto rendered them” (Roswell & Burgess, 2017, p. 74). Furthermore, without conceptual tools to analyze students’ meaning beyond textual production (either written or oral) and without the ability to account for (mis)intended design, PoM may overlook less obvious elements such how neoliberalism in EAP and higher education shapes students’ meaning-making and textual production. For this reason, I draw on Deleuzian assemblage and affect.

### **Assemblage and Affect: Extending “A pedagogy of multiliteracies”**

Cole and Pullen (2009) suggest the longevity of PoM is in part due to its malleability, its “ability to absorb and integrate with other theories of education” (p. 4). Before connecting PoM to other theories, it is important to recognize the fundamental difference between PoM and Deleuzian concepts beginning with very different onto-epistemological starting points with the former based in phenomenology and language centered social constructivist ontology (Masny & Waterhouse, 2011, p. 290). On the other hand, Deleuzian

ontology is one of relationality, de-centering the human actor and language as non-representational (Fox & Alldred, 2015).

Although the NLG did not prescribe a particular framework to research how meaning-making unfolds in literacy practices, as Leander and Boldt (2013) observe, “a Pedagogy of Multiliteracies is saturated with text-centrism” (p. 32) which “prompts us to interpret backward from texts to practices — to infer literacy practices from textual forms, even when other aspects of social practices are clearly evident” (p. 33). Multiliteracies research typically relies on discursive explanation of/through student texts that emerge as a result of pedagogic intervention (Clough & Halley, 2007; Leander & Boldt, 2013). Furthermore, PoM maintains a human centered intentionality where students are in charge of their designs. Students become “agents of their own cultural and social making” (Kuby, 2017, p. 882) through the texts they produce in class, and in research through the utterances they produce as interview participants. Yet, as Smith (2016) argues, to understand how student’s texts are produced, how meaning is made, and what meaning is made, “we need the ability to account for a wide variety of participants in and products of semiotic moments” (p. 126), and not just the production of prescribed textual products by ideal students through expected means. The concepts of assemblage and affect allow for us to expand the range of meaning-making potential by adding deeper dimension to the design process.

Here, my point is not to critique PoM research for its epistemological underpinning or research tools, but to highlight how text-centric perspectives based on a stable and representational view of language can overlook less obvious or indirectly related elements that contribute to learning (Burgess, 2020; Kuby, 2017). In other words, literacy practices cannot be attributed independently to primary actors (student and instructor) and their cognitive capacities and intentions (Smith, 2016); literacy emerges in conjunction with, and codependent on other people, objects and places in a network of things (Lenters, 2016).

Recently, the concept of assemblage has become an increasingly popular concept in literacy research. Deleuzian assemblage refers to the multiple and diverse heterogenous elements and objects connecting, entering into relation with others in unpredictable ways, making and unmaking each other, all while working towards indeterminate outcomes (Wise, 2005). To literacy research, Leander and Boldt (2013) define assemblage as “the collection of things that happen to be present in any given context. These things have no necessary relation to one another, and they lack organization, yet their happenstance coming together” (p. 25). To investigate digitally mediated academic writing, Bhatt and de Roock (2013) use the concept of sociomaterial assemblage “to carefully attend to the ecology of practices (and the contestations, impasses, break-

throughs, etc)” (p. 6) to see how “realities (such as class work, assignment are done)” (p. 6). In simpler terms, assemblage allows the researcher to examine linkages between human actors, material objects, language, structures, policies, ideologies and subjectivities, all of which contribute to how students’ make meaning and produce texts.

### *Affect*

For Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987), the assemblage operates through the concept of affect. Affect replaces the notion of agency (as an ability to act) with a productive capacity that can “affect and be affected,” in that it may or may not change the state or capacities of the entity (Massumi, 1987, p. xii). Affect is the force that connects elements in the assemblage and produces constant movement and potential. Affects are “those visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion — that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 1). When applied to literacy practice, affect highlights the “confluence of practices, interactions, and relationships” (Vasudevan, 2009, p. 357) whereby the particular actions, intentions and affects cannot be reduced and attributed to one sole element. When applied to educational research, affect works against representational logics such as the ability to categorize and codify observable phenomena and the tendency (within traditional modes of scientific inquiry) to rely exclusively on what can be identified, measured and labelled. Affect allows the researcher to think beyond representation to “forces understood as feelings, senses, and the subconscious” (Collier et al., 2015, pp. 396–367). The epistemological difference between the phenomenological roots of PoM and the relational ontology of Deleuzian assemblage and affect allows us to understand a more holistic view of an international student’s (mis)intended academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism) beyond what looked obvious and evident.

### *Methodology*

This study was conducted at an EAP program affiliated to a large Canadian urban university. Like many non-credit EAP programs designed to prepare incoming international students university-level study, the program is based on a cost-recovery business model, thus self-financed independent of the university (Ding & Bruce, 2017). The program consists of four levels (each level spanning a 12-week semester) with level 4 as the bridging level. Only upon completion of level 4 can students enter their program of study and begin to take credit-bearing courses to fulfill their degree requirements. Most students hold conditional acceptance to undergraduate programs (and, sometimes, graduate programs), and opt to take the EAP course in lieu of meeting language profi-



ciency test scores (i.e., IELTS) as per university regulation.

This study is an extension of a larger ethnographic case study that was conducted from September 2016 to April 2017 and involved two separate course sections (Fall 2016 and Winter 2017). Student and teacher participants were recruited from two level 4 classes. Data collection included weekly teacher and student interviews, drafts of students' written work (with instructor comments) and screen-cast recording of students' research paper writing process. The research paper assignment was an ongoing project that spanned several weeks and corresponded with the course learning objectives of developing academic reading and writing skills as well as academic readiness. More specifically, it was a mandatory assignment of 800–1000 words that incorporated the following skills: “a) Research a topic using a variety of valid sources and methods to collect information and data; b) Cite and reference properly to avoid plagiarism; c) Proofread for grammar, vocabulary, and reference efforts.”<sup>3</sup> On top of the research paper, successful completion of level 4 required a score over 70% on written exams and course work making the program high-stakes for international students.

For this study, I focus on one student participant, W.A., as she presented rich interview data that is not easily explained. The guiding research questions for this study are:

1. How do neoliberal ideologies and identities impact EAP students' textual production in research-paper writing?
2. How might academic transgressions unfold therein?

Over the course of one month, W.A. volunteered to participate in six interviews to explore her writing process. All interviews took place on the university campus. Table 1 indicates the date and length of each of W.A.'s interviews.

### **The foci participant: W.A.**

I first meet W.A. in January 2017, and she had been in Canada and attending the EAP program for approximately 4 months. Before coming to Canada, W.A. attended what she called a “Chinese and English cooperative school” which followed the British Columbia curriculum. At this school, she was introduced to English academic writing but claimed that she did not pay attention in class and was not interested in studying. In the fall, she was enrolled in the final level of the program but did not pass, and thus was re-doing the course in the Winter

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<sup>3</sup>For reasons of confidentiality, neither the document nor the institution can be named. However, the exact wording of the assignment is disclosed, for methodology purposes.

**Table 1**

Interview schedule and length

Interview Date	Length of Interview (in Minutes and Seconds)
3/2/2017	23:36
3/6/2017	29:47
3/14/2017	35:01
3/26/2017	35:57
4/3/2017	26:12
4/10/2017	10:58

2017 term. Aside from the EAP course, W.A. was not enrolled in any other courses. As a student who, from the outset, did not pretend to be interested in her course work, W.A. volunteered extensively to participate in the study.

W.A. was part of the Winter 2017 cohort. Like all the courses in the EAP program, W.A. had 15 hours of in class instruction from two different instructors (nine-hour instructor and six-hour instructor) and an additional six hours of review, oral communication practice, and socio-cultural activities with a teaching assistant per week. The instructor leading the research paper assignment met with the class twice per week (six hours) and focused on the research paper and building student autonomy and academic readiness. For the research paper assignment, the instructor adopted a unique approach; rather than setting fixed due dates for the entire class, students made a self-directed working schedule. This meant that each student was working at their own pace and the instructor would guide students through the process and provide feedback on their drafts. For W.A., her working outline is shown in Table 2 and interviews were scheduled to correspond with this sequence:

**Table 2**

Working outline

<b>February 13–19</b>	Abstract and Introduction Settle abstract
<b>February 21–30</b>	Body Paragraph1 and Research Questions
<b>March 1–10</b>	Body Paragraph2
<b>March 11–20</b>	Body Paragraph3
<b>March 21–30</b>	Conclusion
<b>April 1–5</b>	Source
<b>April 5–10</b>	Reference

By the end of the data collection, W.A. had participated in six interviews (total 2:35:35) (Table 1) and submitted five drafts of her work to the researcher.

### **Researcher positionality**

It is important to disclose the researcher's relationality to the participant. At the time of the interviews, I was a teaching assistant for the Winter 2017 cohort and knew W.A. from class where I reviewed the material taught by the morning instructor, practiced oral communication and engaged the students in socio-cultural activities. There are important ethical considerations when researchers hold a position of power, and this is further complicated when conducting in situ research where student plagiarism may be identified (Pecorari, 2015; Shi, 2006). According to ethic review board guidelines, I was to ensure that participants did not receive academic advantage from participating in the study. Here, academic advantage could include supplementary academic support during the interviews or differential treatment in class. On this point, as a T.A., I was not involved in the grading of their daily course work, assignments, tests or exams. My primary task as a T.A. was to monitor participation and to create opportunities for students to improve their oral communication.

### **Data analysis: Rhizoanalysis**

W.A.'s interview data was analysed through rhizoanalysis (Masny, 2013). Rhizoanalysis derives from Deleuze and Guattari's (1980/1987) central concept of rhizome which is characterized by interconnectivity, heterogeneity, multiplicity, rupture, tracing and mapping (Masny, 2016). Particularly relevant to research methods are the final two principles: tracing and mapping. Tracing is typically employed in post-qualitative data analysis and involves categorizing and coding data based on interpretative meaning (Martin & Kamberlis, 2013). In the first phase of data analysis, W.A.'s data was traced (coded) through PoM's dimensions of available design, designing and re-designed. Tracing PoM dimensions did not sufficiently explain the larger ideological force (e.g., neoliberalism in the EAP program) where W.A. is negotiating her knowledge design and meaning-making in her textual production. Due to the messiness and inexplicability of W.A.'s data, I turn to mapping to examine how broader contextual factors including the social, cultural, economic, political, ideological and affective conditions shape W.A.'s meaning-making and (mis)conduct in her textual production.

Mapping is used to explore how open systems are contingent, unpredictable and productive (Martin & Kamberlis, 2013), and it involves asking questions not to reach fixed answer, but to explore ongoing linkages. Questions posed in rhizoanalysis include: What else might be contributing to this event? How else can this data be understood? How could this have happened otherwise? (Roy,

2003). Through constant questioning and reconfiguring the data, rhizoanalysis can reveal the latency of neoliberal undercurrents in EAP that (may) shape L2 students' meaning-making and textual production in source-based writing.

In the following section, data is presented first as a tracing of the PoM dimensions of available design, design and re-designed to show W.A.'s transformation as a learner. Then, the same data is analysed through rhizomatic mapping to demonstrate how the latency of neoliberal subjectivities may be contributing to W.A.'s meaning-making and textual production.

## **Results**

### **A PoM perspective**

#### *Online resources and design: Developing a transgressive identity*

At different stages of the assignment, W.A. drew on diverse influences, materials and tools, both digital and non-digital, to compose her research paper: The topic of her research paper, the gender pay gap in the United States, extended from the first chapter of their course textbook on social issues and her interest in a recent opinion column written by an Academy Award-winning American actress who she admired, Jennifer Lawrence.<sup>4</sup> W.A. used both the Google search engine and Baidu, a Chinese search engine, to find source texts, but she did not use the university library website as advised by her instructor. From the internet information search, she selected source texts to form the basis of her research paper. In terms of available design, a key criterion of the research paper assignment was the integration of academic source texts, as opposed to mass media and non-academic materials, a requirement that proved central to how she engaged with source texts and designed her assignment.

In Interview 3 W.A. explained the available design and her design of the preliminary reference list. W.A. knew that she should only use academic sources, but she instead used online material (not from an academic article or book) and then attributed this information to the author of a book to meet the assignment requirements. She explained this as "just a little bit cheating. I found information from the internet and put the books name" (Interview 3). W.A. was not the only participant who departed from the prescribed assignment guidelines to use non-academic material, nor was she the only participant who was confused about what qualified as an academic journal in comparison a non-academic periodical. Yet, she was the only participant to admit to falsifying titles and identifying this strategy as "cheating." In the same interview, W.A. goes on to explain that she copied her research paper outline from the internet

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<sup>4</sup>Jennifer Lawrence wrote an open letter "Why Do I Make Less than my Male Co-Stars?," published on Lena Dunham's website *Lenny* (Oct. 15, 2015).

even though she thought “that the outline is not good for my research paper. I just handed it in as homework . . . . The teacher said nothing. He thinks that the outline is mine” (Interview 3). W.A. admitted another academic transgression on top of the falsification of sources in her preliminary bibliography. Thus far, W.A. did not appear to see the relevance of creating an outline for her research paper, and her disregard for the integrity of assignment manifests in the re-design.

W.A.’s practice of copying from the internet reappears in Interview 4. At this point, she had just submitted her introduction and two body paragraphs and was awaiting feedback. On her computer, she showed me a draft of what she submitted to her instructor, a 13-page document of which 9 pages constituted a copied reference list. W.A. explained that “I just copied and pasted. I didn’t see the article whether it is useful for my research paper” and submitted it to the teacher because “he asked us to give him the research paper before Tuesday, so I just did it quickly.” Confused as to why W.A. would do that, I wondered if it was an error. To clarify, I asked whether she uploaded the document as a Microsoft Word file or if she printed it, to which she replied, printed. Yet again, W.A.’s selection from available design and her own design leads to both her, and her work, re-designed as transgressive.

*Human resources and design:*

*Expanding human resources and design*

Another source of available design for W.A. were her peers inside the program and her colleagues outside the program. Peer input was relevant in shaping W.A.’s perception of the research paper, more specifically that the research paper did not count for marks:

W.A.: . . . last semester, my friend told me that in the end of the semester we did a research paper and handed it to the teacher and after the final exam, my friend didn’t pass, and my friend asked the teacher about her mark on the research paper and the teacher said I haven’t looked at it yet, and so, that doesn’t make sense. So, I think the research paper doesn’t count for marks . . . . I think the research paper is handed in one week before the final exam, so I think they don’t have time to look at it (giggling). (Interview 3)

W.A.’s stated belief that the research paper did not count for marks can explain her treatment of selecting sources and submitting a copied outline and reference list. This suspicion serves as available design and contextualizes the meaning-making behind the design described in the section above.

W.A. also drew on her peers in the designing process to assist her in drafting sections of her research paper. In the following passages from Interview 4, she described her weekly progress on the research paper. She had submitted a

draft of the thesis statement, but she quickly shared that it was not written entirely by herself. The instructor recognized that it was not W.A.'s own writing:

The teacher said that I did not give him the references about what I am writing on the thesis statement ... Because he didn't believe that it is my own writing, so he asked me to give him the references on the thesis statement ... But I write of some it, but I didn't copy from the internet. I asked someone to help me. Some CBC — Canadian-born Chinese — to help me ... But it is not plagiarism, right? (Interview 4)

At the university level, it is expected that students write alone, unless specified otherwise. When drawing on the work of others, transparency and clear attribution are paramount to maintain academic integrity. The co-authorship of W.A.'s thesis statement would be viewed as transgressive especially when there is a clear expectation of independent authorship. Another interesting point in this exchange was W.A.'s understanding that the teacher wanted references, but it is unclear whether the presence of references would represent that W.A. wrote the thesis statement alone. Furthermore, the degree to which her friend contributed to the writing of the thesis statement and her understanding of authorial ownership was unclear. W.A. went on to dispute her ownership of the thesis statement in question:

**W.A.:** I thought it was perfect for my thesis statement. I don't want to change it. It was so good.

**Researcher (R):** It was really good, but the problem is that it is not yours ...

**W.A.:** But I want a good mark, and if I want a good mark, I will use this one.

**R:** But I think the teacher says no, you can't use it.

**W.A.:** He didn't say that, but he just say, he just looked at me and said, "You know how to do it, right?" (Interview 4)

W.A. was correct; according to her testimony, her instructor did not say that she could not use the thesis statement. This could be confirmed if there was written feedback, but without any written instruction, I was unsure what W.A. would, or should do with the questionable thesis statement.

Interestingly, at our next interview a week later, W.A. acknowledged the inappropriateness of having her friend (help her to) write the thesis statement, conceding that in the future, she would not ask her friend. Instead, in a laughing tone, she announced that she anticipated the researcher to be her new source of assistance. Simply put, when asked who she would go to for help with her assignment, she answered "You (laughing) ... Because I am afraid to ask my friends to help me again ..." (Interview 5). W.A. did not explain what she expected the researcher to do to help her, nor did I probe into what she meant by that statement. All participants were explicitly advised that their participation in the research was separate from their academic course work, and that

despite my relationship with them as their teaching assistant, I could not provide them additional academic or linguistic support that would give them an advantage (in comparison to the students who did not participate in the study). I presumed W.A.'s statement to be performative and consistent with her humor and tendency for disruptive statements. Nonetheless, her proposition of asking the researcher to help with her assignment suggested her ability to expand her network of available design.

### *Plagiarism and design*

Despite W.A.'s dubious practices in selecting available designs and designing, she was determined to avoid any allegation of plagiarism that would jeopardize her academic standing. At the end of Interview 4, W.A. explained how she received a zero on a homework assignment from another teacher in the EAP program (the nine-hour teacher) because she plagiarized. This instructor taught academic writing skills including summarizing, paraphrasing, citing, and referencing. What bothered W.A. most about this allegation was that she was singled out. Other students in the class were also accused of plagiarism on that assignment, but according to W.A., the teacher explained that as "punishment because of your plagiarism," she was the only student not allowed to resubmit a revised draft:

**W.A.:** The teacher is very mad at me. She said that if I see you do that one more time, I will bring you to the see the manager and you cannot stay in the EAP program anymore.

**R:** So, what are you going to do?

**W.A.:** I won't do it next time. . . I went home, and I was very upset, but I thought, I can't stay upset anymore, so I wrote an email to that teacher. I said, dear teacher, I feel so sorry that I plagiarism. I won't do it anymore. Here is my rewrite. Could you please receive my rewrite? (Interview 4)

W.A.'s understanding of the consequences of plagiarism contrasted that of her instructor, and W.A. hoped to re-design the transgressive assignment into one that was acceptable. Again, W.A. achieved this by drawing on available design to email a private apology to her instructor along with an attached draft of her revised assignment.

W.A.'s declarative and procedural knowledge of plagiarism as an act of academic dishonesty was further reflected in Interview 6. This was in the final days of semester when the final draft of the research paper was due, and the instructor warned that automated plagiarism detection software would be used to check the final assignments.<sup>5</sup> By this point in the course, the students had

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<sup>5</sup>W.A. and other participants in the winter cohort explained that plagiarism on the research paper assignment had become a rampant problem, so the teacher began warn-

received extensive instruction on how to avoid plagiarism and were expected to comply with academic conventions for citation and referencing. Here, W.A. explained the importance of avoiding plagiarism and how she used citations to this effect:

**W.A.:** He told us . . . if you use one plagiarism in your research paper, then the whole research paper will be count for zero.

**R:** OK. Do you think that you will have a problem with that in your research paper?

**W.A.:** You can see in my research paper how many in-text citations. So many. Because I spent three nights and the first night, I just finish them, and the second night, I just add some information. And the third night, I just check for my grammatical errors and if there is anything wrong with my in-text citations. (Interview 6)

From the transcript, W.A. presumed that the presence of in-text citations would authenticate that the assignment is plagiarism-free. At this point, W.A. seemed to appreciate the significance of full and complete source attribution and invested the requisite time and energy to comply with the instructor's expectation. Although it is evident that W.A. tested the boundaries on what is acceptable while ensuring that she received academic credit for the work she submitted, in this final excerpt W.A. has been redesigned from a misguided student looking to cut corners to a conscientious student seeking perfection. W.A.'s diligence demonstrated in preparing her draft for final submission contrasts with her earlier designs and her questionable textual-borrowing, and this redesign cannot be viewed as separate or independent from her earlier designs. Nor are earlier elements of redesign separate from how she uses existing resources and tools differently (such as the internet to check citations and grammar rather than the internet to borrow unattributed content).

Analysis of W.A.'s textual production in this source-based research paper demonstrates the multiple transformations in her relationality to source texts, instructors, the program and her own writing, learning and positionality as a student. However, in terms of the (re)configured design process, from the interview data, it is still difficult to determine W.A.'s intentions and meaning-making. This uncertainty is not a critique of the researcher's ability to get to the truth of the matter, nor is it to discount W.A.'s data as atypical and incomplete. To remind, the data presented thus far was selected for its messiness, and its utility in exploring the inexplicability of meaning-making reflected in design. This creates space for alternative ontological approaches to enhance PoM to deal with the complexity of students' subjectivities, possible neoliberal identi-

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ing the class of a mandatory originality check for all submitted research papers. The instructor conceded in his interview that this warning served as a deterrent and the university did not have access to automated plagiarism detection software.



ties and contestation in text production.

### **An assemblage and affect perspective**

While PoM allows us to understand W.A.'s how she navigated the research paper writing process and how select designs influenced her textual production, there are still lingering questions regarding W.A.'s meaning-making such as how the quantity of citations equates to a plagiarism-free paper, or how sending an email can remediate a sanction or how ownership of student's text is determined. Next, using the concepts of assemblage and affect, I analyzed W.A.'s interview data to explore overlooked, less obvious or indirectly related elements that may contribute to W.A.'s design. In doing to, I discuss how traces of neoliberal discourse manifests in W.A. interviews, and how these traces contribute to meaning-making and textual production.

#### *Affective forces in W.A.'S writing assemblage*

Certain expressions in W.A.'s interview connect to the institutional context of EAP programs as a neoliberal mechanism within global higher education and conjure the notion of commodity and transaction. For instance, in the early stages of the research paper assignment, W.A. justifies her ambivalence towards findings academic source texts and preparing an outline by stating that "This paper won't count for marks" (Interview 3), which makes me wonder, if it did count towards her final grade, would she have treated it differently? This makes sense when we consider the high-stakes nature of EAP pathway programs that can determine whether a student can enter their undergraduate program of study or require an additional semester of EAP support. Perhaps, because it didn't count for marks, it was not important or serious, thus W.A. was unabashed to commit "just a little cheating" (Interview 3).

W.A.'s belief that the research paper did not count for a grade came from her friend's experience the previous semester. This rumor might have been confirmed when W.A. submitted two transgressive assignments without reprimand from her instructor. These events as available design, shape the re-designed and how W.A. proceeded with her research paper assignment. The instructor soon suspected the authenticity of W.A.'s work when he told her to include references to show where that language and information in the thesis statement came from. W.A. maintained that she had the right to use it and receive academic credit for it because "I write some of it" and she wanted a good mark (Interview 4). W.A.'s rationale is difficult to explain or justify. Perhaps W.A.'s entitlement comes from her belief that ownership extends to her deployment of resources, including human resources and possible collaborators, elements in her assemblage that she can access as available design to help her achieve her academic goal. Other student participants who were struggling with their

course work lamented on the absence of private tutoring services that they relied on in the English-medium high school years. Of course, tutors do not write students' homework assignment, but perhaps W.A.'s solicitation for help from a friend, was more collaborative than contractual. Maybe, they wrote it "together" as W.A. claimed.

W.A. seemed to be adept in mobilizing resources as evidenced in her suggestion that the researcher be of assistance to her now that she was too afraid to ask her friend for help (Interview 5). W.A.'s expectation of assistance from the researcher again suggests the notion of transaction as if she earned a favour in return for her participation in the study. It is unclear whether W.A. reached this conclusion, but simply because we cannot explain this meaning behind this utterance to a specific influence, it does not mean that this possibility does not exist.

W.A. did not explicitly state that she expected academic support in return for participation in study, but the notion of transaction and submitting an assignment in exchange for academic credit was further reified in W.A.'s interviews. In Interview 4, W.A. emphasized that her instructor had set a hard deadline, abandoning the original structure of self-designed working schedules. Recall that W.A. submitted nine pages of a copied reference list. Perhaps this was in response to her instructor's earlier demand to provide references to support her questionable thesis statement. In academic writing, a robust reference list is often considered a reflection of accuracy and tenacity, and students may even include extra citations and bibliographic entries to create a more favorable impression on the assessor (Harwood & Petrić, 2012). Perhaps offering nine pages of a copied reference list was an attempt to satisfy the instructor's demand and to provide ample evidence that the questionable thesis statement was in fact, legitimate.

Indeed, this reasoning runs contrary to the expectations of academic integrity in academic writing, yet if W.A. viewed this research paper as a program requirement that did not count for grades (Interview 3), perhaps she also thought that her work would not be viewed as a representation of her knowledge and skill. Perhaps, W.A. thought the research paper assignment was an exercise in following instructions, meeting course requirements, developing autonomy and identifying the stages of the research paper writing rather than demonstrating academic language, literacy and the capacity to actually compose a research paper. Recall that from W.A.'s point of view, instructors did not have time to grade the research papers at the end of semester (Interview 3).

W.A.'s confusion over instructor expectation arises again when she explains her strategy of writing a letter to her instructor in response to her sanctioned plagiarism. Perhaps in W.A.'s mind, demonstrations of effort would suffice, and students would be allowed to re-do the assignment again and again

until they got it right, which is more consistent with the pedagogic, approach to plagiarism avoidance adopted in this EAP program. Towards the end of the assignment, W.A. realized that her instructor was carefully evaluating their work. She also realized the severity of plagiarism. Her testimony suggests a perceived commodification of learning where one transgression negates academic credit for the entire project. She also refers to the quantity of in-text citations and the length of time spent on her references as if the sheer number of in-text citations and the amount of time spent will guard against plagiarism. Perhaps W.A. held the belief that the more citations, the better (Li & Casanave, 2012; Stapleton, 2010), and if citations are representative of a student's diligence, then W.A. may have felt compelled to add unnecessary citations (McCulloch, 2013; Petrić & Harwood, 2013), just as she added nine pages of extra references to her previously submitted reference list. This is not to suggest W.A.'s (mis)intended meaning, but if as literacy researchers, we hope to grasp how students' meaning making occurs, then we might have to concede that it involves more than what appears in the students' textual production; it might also include the "non-cognitive, affective, embodied, and unconscious ways that people create and comprehend texts" (Smith, 2016, p. 126).

## *Summary and discussion*

### **Insights from PoM**

From a PoM perspective, in the earlier stages of the assignment, W.A. was misguided and her conduct, transgressive. This transformed towards the end of the assignment where she demonstrates greater responsibility in the production of her work. W.A.'s approach to the assignment might extend from its atypical format as most of the graded academic writing tasks in the EAP program consisted of teacher selected texts and demonstrations of source-based writing proficiency in classroom testing conditions.

Student autonomy was inherent to the research paper assignment and to W.A.'s meaning-making. The centrality of technology, tools and digital texts adds to the complexity of source-based research paper writing and the range of available design for W.A. to draw on (Li & Casanave, 2012; Stapleton, 2010). As with all outside of class work, teachers are not privy to what happens when students go home and turn on their computers to work on their assignments, further obscuring the students' meaning-making process. Pedagogically, how L2 students navigate between digital tools, languages and texts in the designing process demands clear instruction and controlled practice. It requires the development of meta-language (i.e., the difference between an academic peer-reviewed article and non-academic, non-peer-reviewed content; capacity to use academic search engine tools; knowledge of academic genres and the qualities

of “good” academic writing, and the importance of transparency in source attribution, etc.), ongoing specific and concrete feedback, meaningful assessment and supported critical engagement with the disciplinary content, academic language, and learning process. Instruction was provided to the students; however, meaning is made differently by each student, and while most students were able to meet program learning objectives in terms of ethical academic writing, W.A. often seemed confused about what was required.

### **Insights from assemblage and affect**

A Deleuzian perspective does not erase the label of misguided and transgressive, nor does it contest the power of W.A.’s transformation. Instead, affect and assemblage offers a greater contextualization of the meaning-making process by revealing the less obvious elements that might be shaping W.A.’s textual production. Not all students will reach the meaning intended by the instructor, and students-meaning making might be influenced by the collusion between marginalized subjectivities such as neoliberal ideologies and identities and ‘western’ liberal education that promotes individualized, autonomous learners.

W.A.’s testimony, reveals her strategic (non)use of time and energy for assignments that might not count for grades in contrast to heavily-weighted assignments that can have zero errors. There is a transactional orientation to the submission of assignments (handing them in because he asked) and contestation of the unspoken expectation for individually produced original and honest work. Marginalized subjectivities include the often-ignored economic context of EAP learning such as the commodification of language learning and quantification of learning (Block et al., d 2012). These notions are reflected in W.A.’s presumption that gestures and the provision of material items (an emailed apology or drafts of assignments) and the quantity of text and effort (long references lists, the number of citations, the number of hours spent) could substitute for the quality of students’ academic work. W.A.’s textual production then turns to the contentious issue of neoliberalism in language education where EAP programs function as student services, outside of the academic and disciplinary education provided in credit-bearing program of study (Ding & Bruce, 2017). One cannot state with certainty that this is in fact what determined W.A.’s meaning-making, nor can we assert that neoliberal ideology is especially present in this particular program; however, this line inquiry reveals the need for further investigation of how neoliberal undercurrents in EAP may be impacting students’ learning.

### **Pedagogic implications**

In terms of specific pedagogic recommendations, I echo Chun’s (2009, 2015) guidance to engage students in critical dialogue to interrogate and contest ne-

oliberal ideologies promulgated in the EAP curriculum, content or practices. Furthermore, because of the nature of the assignment, special attention should also be called to the role of digital literacies in EAP. Here, Christiansen (2017) advises instructors to place greater awareness on the role of digital literacies and outside of school textual consumption/production on formal learning tasks, such as this highly technical source-based research paper.

Effective pedagogical intervention demands reflection from both the student and the instructor of their subjectivities and positionality vis-a-vis other human actors, materials objects, expressions, structures, ideologies, affects and desires (Motha & Lin, 2014). The inexplicability of W.A.'s data begs us to ask, whether instructors, even the most conscientious, really know their students and what their students desire. Highlighting this discrepancy, Lea and Street (1998) observe that student writing in higher education is becoming more,

concerned with the processes of meaning-making and contestation around meaning rather than as skills or deficits. . . one explanation for problems in student writing might be the gaps between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing. (p. 159)

Lea and Street's observation drives home the importance for educators to reconnect with learners, and to heed to the "expression of their (students') voice which draws upon the unique mix of meaning making resources, the codes and conventions they happen to have found in their contexts and cultures" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 165).

PoM aspires to account for the network of social processes that impact formal literacy practices and to extend formal learning to self-text-world transformation. Openness of this nature creates space for infinite influences and possibilities, but how can we account for influences that we are not directly apparent? Influences may be hidden from classroom discourse and practice, and influences may be taken for granted such as the everyday digital communication habits that promote unfettered borrowing and sharing, the expectation of fixed deadlines (as opposed to self-directed learning), the absence of written feedback and evaluation, the presumption that once the rules are taught, students will obediently follow or the exorbitant cost of international student tuition in university-affiliated EAP pathway programs. While these elements undoubtedly contribute to available design, their relevance may go unquestioned when the focus is on the student as an intentional designer working consciously and rationally in text production.

I do not propose a new set of prescribed steps and principles for instructors to ascertain the knowledge, subjectivities and desires of L2 international students, but I do reaffirm the responsibility of all instructors, curriculum developers and program administrators to pay closer attention to more than just

textual production as final products representative of language and literacy proficiency. A refocus away from text-centrism means attending to the “visceral forces (that) come into being and circulate as participants interact and move in and out of relationships with each other” (Burgess, 2020, p. 803). That includes all the confusion, messiness and discomfort that comes with addressing student misconduct.

### ***Conclusion***

Twenty-five years ago, PoM (NLG, 1996) expanded the concept of literacy and literacy practices from fixed meanings and conventional representation of standard grammar, correct answers and shared interpretation. Learners come to the classroom with existing knowledge and experience that contribute as a reservoir of available design from which new meaning is made. Literacy is represented through new designs which are added as possible influences for future design. Despite the efforts of PoM to broaden literacies practices, without the conceptual tools to do so, there is still a risk of codifying non-normative representations of learning (Leander & Boldt, 2013). For this reason, scholars have begun experimenting with alternative onto-epistemological frameworks to expand what can be considered as contributors to literacy practices and what literacy practices can be. This study joins this move towards experimentations in educational research by connecting the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) and their concepts of assemblage and affect to PoM, and in doing so, joins a growing body of Deleuzian-inspired research that builds on multi-literacies to account for the complex linguistic, cultural, socio-political and economic reality of modern-day learning. (Burgess, 2020; Collier et al., 2015; Kuby, 2017; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Lenters, 2016).

W.A.'s data examined through a PoM framework alone cannot explain the logic and intention behind W.A.'s designs. As argued above, other less obvious elements may have been involved, such as neoliberal ideologies circulating in EAP. From a PoM perspective, we can see meaning making in the selection of available design, design and redesigned. This reading privileges W.A.'s identity as a misguide student transformed into a diligent and capable student. As such, we might miss equally important connections that emerge from the omnipresent socio-political-economic undercurrent in EAP programs. PoM combined with assemblage and affect highlights W.A.'s multiple subjectivities as a student, not just in relation to literacies practices but also as a desiring English language learner operating in a global market system that commodifies linguistic capital and Western academic credentials as key to professional success (Chun, 2016; Motha & Lin, 2014). W.A.'s (re)design was atypical in many ways; most participants were not as tactically creative, and W.A. was unique in her performativity, but it would be naïve to think that the less obvious influence

of neoliberalism in EAP are unique to her alone.

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