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Ethnography: Expanding the boundaries in EAP

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In this chapter we will look at how ethnography helps both us to understand our students and our students to understand the nature of the University and of EAP. Furthermore, because of how ethnography has become a de-centring, postmodern methodology which defies common structures, it reveals a perhaps previously unrecognized knowledge and competence that students either bring with them or are able to discover. We will first look at the nature of ethnography and its potential contribution. Then, by means of the ethnographic method of creative non-fiction, we will demonstrate what we can learn about our students and the knowledge that they bring. In considering the possibilities of ethnography for EAP, we treat ethnography not as simply a data collection method, but as a social theory which offers 'a general programmatic *perspective* on social reality and how real subjects in real conditions of everyday life, possessed by real interests, make sense of it' (Blommaert, 2018: ix).

Ethnographic expansion in UK Higher Education

Since its historical colonial legacy, ethnography has undergone a thorough re-examination, for example, by Clifford (1988) and Fabian (1983), to the point where it can now be seen as operating within a counter-hegemonic paradigm (Blommaert and Jie, 2010) and no longer confined to the discipline of anthropology. This has entailed a disassociation from the image of the intrepid Western anthropologist sailing to faraway lands to study 'natives' and a distancing from the Greek origin of the prefix 'ethnos' meaning 'folk people', 'tribes' or 'natives' to a decolonial understanding which is arguably more resonate with

'ethical' (Tyler, 1986: 122). Similarly, rather than the positivist position where the ethnographer is an objective observer and recorder of the so-imagined real world, ethnography now requires reflexivity where the ethnographer's stance and subjectivity are acknowledged and where there is a shift to an interest in how worlds are constructed rather than naïvely trying to describe them as objectively real things.

This reframing of ethnography has led to the recognition of the decolonial potential that it offers Higher Education (HE) with specific growth and salience across the social sciences and humanities. Wells et al. (2019: 1) argue that for Modern Languages, '[a]n ethnographic sensitivity encourages an openness to less hierarchical and hegemonic forms of knowledge, particularly when consciously seeking to invert the traditional colonial ethnographic project and envision instead more participatory and collaborative models of engagement'. This argument is similarly applicable to EAP where an ethnographically informed pedagogy can foster an active and critical approach.

There is a considerable history of critical ethnographically informed studies of specific universities and practices within HE (Thompson, 1970; Bourdieu, 1988; Edwards and Usher, 2000; Molesworth, et al., 2011; Cribb and Gewirtz, 2013; Collins, 2018; Bond, 2020). While these studies have the potential to inform academic debate and understanding of HE, they only feed rather indirectly into pedagogy. Ethnographic approaches in the field of linguistic ethnography have engaged more directly with pedagogy and specifically academic writing. Lillis (2008) classifies these approaches into three different degrees of depth. First, ethnography as 'method' generally makes analytical use of research participants' 'talk around text'. Second, more sustained engagement associated with ethnography as a 'methodology' draws on a wider set of data sources such as observed behaviour and a full range of cultural artefacts and may include repeated engagement with research participants in the form of cyclical talk around text. Third, ethnographic engagement can be pushed further by drawing on notions such as deep theorizing (Blommaert, 2007) and habitus (Bourdieu, 1991) and by considering how social structures and cultural and political dimensions affect how writing is produced and received. While these three approaches are valuable for EAP, they are largely from the perspective of researchers seeking to understand the academic writer, their writing process and how they are affected by the specific institutional context, and this is achieved through the analysis of the participants' texts and participant data about their texts.

A broader expansion of ethnographic possibilities emerges in the work of Paltridge, Starfield and Tardy (2016) who expand their focus from solely

academic writing to also engage, with identity, socio-politics and power as well as considerable coverage of autoethnography. The emergence of autoethnography in HE is more recent and influenced by Canagarajah (1996, 1997, 2002, 2012) who draws on alternative narrative, autobiographical, dialogic and collaborative research methods. What stands out here is that student autoethnography is not limited to writing on behalf of or for the benefit of an academic researcher but serves as an outlet for voicing unrecognized lived experiences and perspectives that challenge institutional structures and academic demands. Stanley (2020: 10–11) argues that critical autoethnographies not only make use of deeply personal narratives which engage with power relations, but they have an 'overtly political agenda' which 'problematize[s] taken-for-granted canonical knowledges and empower[s] other ways of knowing'. Autoethnography often engages with academic writing and is thus particularly salient to EAP, but it also considers wider issues within the institutional context including identity (ex. Wang, 2020), native-speakerism (ex. Ahn and Delesclefs, 2020) and epistemological violence (ex. Bishop, 2020). This shift to student-led ethnographic engagement can open possibilities in EAP for a critical pedagogy and help students to make sense of the university and EAP practitioners to learn more about their students.

Critical language awareness for academic writing and university discourses

Raising critical language awareness is germane to EAP and an ethnographic lens can illuminate how, as noted by Fairclough nearly thirty years ago, language as discourse influences the shaping of society (1992: 9). Clark (1992: 118) highlights that '[t]he notion of an academic discourse community implies that there is a set of shared values and beliefs, of discoursal conventions', while also recognizing that 'like all communities' it 'is not monolithic'. Students therefore not only need to learn about academic discoursal conventions, but also need to strategically choose when to conform or when not conform to these. Ethnography can help inform these decisions as it provides a view of language away from a singular and static object of study to a focus on situated, fluid and embedded social practices which are context dependent. Ethnography also requires an active sense of engagement, with a greater sense of agency and ownership of both language and knowledge production – to promote dialogue, encourage a student-ethnographer to challenge previously held assumptions and provide a space for the sharing of knowledge and experiences. It is in this vein that through the

creative non-fiction descriptions in this chapter we look at how students locate constructed aspects of writing within a wider discoursal setting.

While students face individual decisions regarding academic conventions in their own work, they also encounter wider discourses which permeate the university environment. These discourses mobilize a range of ideological agendas that exert the ontological and epistemological framing of global HE education. These agendas can seem to limit and exclude other possible ways of seeing and being in the world 'in attempting to make only certain meanings possible' (Edwards and Usher, 2000: 141). This is apparent in HE through the rise of increased 'neoliberal' transactional, managerial and marketized discourses. While 'neoliberal' may have become an overused and simplistic signifier for all that is wrong in HE, examples of neoliberal discourses remain evident – e.g. in how notions such as 'critical thinking' or the so-labelled 'native-speaker' are constructed to Other out-groups. Ethnography can be a tool for deconstructing such discourses and highlighting the stark differences between university discourse and the ways in which various social actors, including students and EAP practitioners, experience a university. A poignant example is Yamchi's (2015) study of Emirati women students appearing not to able to apply the necessary criticality to 'correctly' perform writing tasks, when in fact they are applying their criticality, out of sight of the teacher because they find the tasks inauthentic. This then leads Yamchi to critique the established discourses of the writing syllabus and her own professionalism. Implicit here is the postmodern realization that the researcher is implicated as an actor in the intersubjective nature of ethnography and therefore needs to work hard to de-centre themselves from whatever structures they are working within (Clifford and Marcus, 1986).

Case study of three students

We illustrate ethnographic possibilities for EAP through a creative non-fiction study of three students who begin to develop an ethnographic eye and critical language awareness as they observe and explore their lives within a university and shared hall of residence roughly over the period of an academic year. Their observations are not always the result of having been given ethnographic assignments, but their EAP practitioner has taken the decision to not limit the learning focus to what may be historically associated with EAP. Thus, not all of the students' observations are about academic practices or academic writing per se, but also about observing phenomena and social interaction within the

wider environment of their daily lives. This blurring of the boundary between daily life and academic work is intentional and is integral to debates about what EAP should be. The scenarios are also situated within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic which has given new perspectives to the students' lives and has amplified many of the issues that they are faced with.

As ethnographic attention has increasingly been turned inwards towards environments which might roughly be considered as 'close to home', this shift to a broader 'sociological imagination' carries ethical implications and often entails a need for ethnographers working as 'insiders' in known environments to adhere to the notion of making the familiar strange (Mills, 1959). Indeed, the pandemic has shown us that, as everyday routines have been severely disrupted, taken-for-granted social patterns have been thrown sideways to the point where the strange has become the everyday norm and has starkly exposed underlying structural issues and ideological positions and how they connect between the professional and the personal across many aspects of our lives. At the same time, some of the changes that are being framed in HE as a response to the pandemic may well become familiar fixtures for years to come.

Creative non-fiction

Creative non-fiction is just one example of ethnographic method. That we choose to use it here is that it seems appropriate to the scenario being studied. Part of the critical versatility of ethnography is that the choice of method is determined by the discovered exigencies of particular settings (Spradley, 1980: 29). In this instance, therefore, creative non-fiction enables us to synthesize our shared experience of engaging with students over a number of years, our knowledge of research about them plus our own experience of making sense of how to write. This is not however an ethnographic research paper. It is a glimpse of an example of ethnography and what it can teach us.

Our particular use of creative non-fiction is informed by Agar (1990). It involves ethnographic reconstructions in which composite events and characters are based upon multiple data sources which may or may not have been purposely collected. It therefore takes in unexpected, emergent data and themes as is central to the nature of ethnography. The fictional nature of the reconstructions also protects the identities of participants.

Creative non-fiction, as with all ethnographic methods, employs disciplines that underpin all ethnography – to combat the accusation that it is simply

made up – (1) allowing meaning to emerge beyond the preoccupations of the researcher, (2) thick description, and (3) making the familiar strange. In creative non-fiction, these disciplines are further ensured through the construction of two or more composite characters each of whom have a different viewpoint so that a conversation is set up from which new meanings can emerge. Thick description implies that we are looking for a triangulated average agreement of what each person thinks. Instead, a picture is developed from what is going on between all of them.

Throughout, we indent the reconstructions as would be the case with other forms of data to separate them from the authorial voice that then stands back and reflexively discusses them. That this data is clearly mediated by how it is authorial constructed as text draws attention to the fact all data, including extracts from interviews, is similarly authorially mediated in how it has been selected for inclusion. Ethnography thus consciously manages the intersubjectivity implicit in all social research.

The students: George, Amira and Mani

We have therefore constructed three students to represent the variety of background and orientation. They are all first-year undergraduates who are studying Politics & International Relations. They are all composites of a wide range of students that we have taught or met and they do not therefore represent any one particular student from whom permission needs to be obtained. The topics of their conversations are pertinent to their lives and their studies and these reflect current discussions which we have engaged in with students ourselves or that we are aware of (for example, see https://internationalstudentsvoices.com/2021/08/04/why-am-i-international-tuition-fees/). Interpretations of what they say or think are therefore entirely our own, though mediated by the ethnographic disciplines referred to above.

George is a British student:

> While there was an assumption in George's family that he would attend university, he remains anxious about the investment and the debt that he would incur during his studies and is therefore concerned about university ranking and graduate salaries. During Covid-19, the University assurances persuaded him to move into campus accommodation for a more protected 'student experience' with 'blended learning'. George is classified by the University as a 'home student' which determines the level of fees that he pays.

We therefore see that George is well-immersed in the marketing discourse of HE, and Covid-19 serves to exaggerate the service-provider dynamic that George later begins to question. This emphasizes that any 'learning experience' will be mediated by these factors.

Amira is from outside the UK and is thus classified as an 'international student' which determines the increased fees she pays for her degree programme in comparison with 'home students'. This does however mean that she gets more 'supportive' treatment:

> Amira, also hesitant because of Covid-19, received similar reassurances from the University regarding the support given to international students. After lengthy discussions with her parents, she travelled to the UK. Prior to starting her degree, she attended two terms of an EAP programme and during her studies she joined discipline-specific EAP support classes which were offered to all students on their course.

Amira thus shares George's exposure to HE discourses, but she is marked as different through the category of 'international student'. This both implies homogeneity for a diverse range of students and has the practical implication of much higher student fees. The 'international student' label also raises theoretical issues in the crossfire of multiple discourses and debates including: immigration, native-speakerism, the commercialisation of internationalization agendas within HE, and cultural disbelief, in the sense that it is presumed that she needs more help. There can also be a high degree of ambivalence about the category of 'international student' felt by the students themselves (Margolis, 2016) as it can produce an uneven dynamic which comes with promise from the university of extra support and services that do not always materialize and it positions these students within a tacit deficit model which suggests that they lack qualities that 'home' students bring to their studies.

Mani is also subject to how the University classifies him:

> Mani's first language is English, but he has also joined EAP support classes as he finds them valuable for his academic work. He's lived in several different countries during his childhood as his parents were required to move frequently with their work and he has not lived in the UK for a sufficient time to qualify for home fees and is therefore also classified as an 'international student' and like Amira pays higher fees. Covid-19 has affected his plans because he isn't able to work and is struggling to make ends meet.

Mani's personal trajectory is therefore one which does not fit neatly into predetermined categories.

Over the years of living in different countries he has grown accustomed to the confusion that often arises when people try to place him within a particular nationality. Even though English is his first language, he often must answer questions about where he learned English, and he frequently receives comments noting how well he speaks English. Although he has been told that these questions and comments can be explained by his ethnicity, he sees these as micro-aggressions as there is no prescribed ethnicity for English language users. Mani finds self-introductions particularly challenging as his mobile adolescence is not easy to explain succinctly and he tends to avoid stating where he is from because it is never just one place. He has noticed as well that certain assumptions are made when his background is revealed such as an expectation that he is very wealthy. Mani believes he is fortunate to share accommodation with George and Amira as they both seem less judgemental about his background.

Amira is intrigued when Mani tells her about his problem with how he's labelled. She tells him that he's lucky because he has arguments for not being labelled as 'international' while she can't possibly escape from the label. Also, while she cannot possibly argue that English is her first language, she never forgets and always cites the experience she has had of helping a so-labelled 'native speaker' student with their grammar because they say they never learnt it at school.

The three students spend quite a lot of time exchanging stories that problematize their learning experience because the mixed messages during the pandemic mean that over much of the academic year, they are the only ones in their accommodation unit and depend on a shared kitchen.

Scenario 1: The ethnographic observation assignment

Amira is talking about the changes that she has noticed within the city and compares this new reality to the University prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

She remembers one of the first tasks that she was asked to complete by her tutor when she joined her EAP course in pre-Covid times. She tells the others that it involved what was called an 'ethnographic observation' in which they had to bring to class what Agar (2006) calls a 'rich point' – an example of one significant observation or incident from on or around campus for discussion. The tutor said that it could be an observation of anything that resonated with them in corridors, offices or other spaces in and around the University. Amira told George and Mani about her own personal observation that was discussed in class.

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She had stood at a road crossing just opposite the University and was looking at her phone and not paying much attention. She noticed a few other people had started to cross the road and assumed the pedestrian light had changed so she started to cross while still looking at her phone. When she stepped out into the road, she noticed a car heading right towards her, so she jumped back just in time. She was really shaken up and a couple of other students who saw what happened, came over and asked if she was OK. That helped, but she was embarrassed.

Amira said that this experience had generated a lot of discussion in the class. A few students started to make comparisons between different nationalities and their approach to pedestrian traffic lights. She said she initially made national comparisons between the approaches in her home country and here, but then she realized that this was too simplistic. Mani and George were surprised when she told them that the experience almost made her obsessed with watching people at road crossings. She told them that she even went to the city centre where there are busy crossings and almost everyone waited for the light there and then compared this to a less busy one where people were more likely to run across the road on a red light when there was no traffic. She said that she could begin to start seeing patterns in who was likely to cross on a red light and who tended to wait and that she started making notes and predictions.

Amira has made a crucial commitment to what Agar (2006) calls 'chasing the rich point'. Rather than simply letting the incident pass or explaining it through simplistic reference to 'cultural differences', Amira decided to dig deeply into this incident, and the rewards are apparent in what follows.

Despite George and Mani's bemusement that Amira spent hours watching people cross roads, they wanted to hear more and ask questions about the class discussion. Amira explained that, as other students recalled their own different approaches to road crossings, they began to agree that their approach to traffic lights really depended on different factors such as location, whether or not they were in a hurry and the type of crossing that was involved. Amira remembered there was a particularly long consideration of zebra crossings and that the tutor had become involved in the discussion and had pointed the students to the work of Blommaert (2018) who had written about the semiotics of zebra crossings. Everyone was taken by the fact that this was a subject which had been written about by an academic.

Amira then told George and Mani that she began to realise the degree of complexity around an apparently simple everyday action like crossing the road. She told them that there is a lot going on that they were unaware of and that it

was also surprising but depressing that different orientations to such a simple practice could be used as a way of judging and Othering people.

Amira's willingness to 'chase the rich point' also allowed her and the other students to counter a culturalist explanation of her observations and to 'negotiate competing narratives for the purpose of overcoming essentialist blocks and finding non-essentialist threads' (Holliday and Amadasi, 2020: 18).

> Amira's recounting of this experience led the three students to continue discussing different daily practices, particularly those that had been affected by Covid-19, and the ways of communicating that were outside their immediate awareness. Mani reported that he'd been on campus two or three times in the whole of the last six months and found it eerie how everyone walked around as though suspicious of each other.
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> They agree that this new reality combined with being confined in a very small flat for most of the day every week was not helping their mental state and that they would welcome the chance to be on a bustling university campus in comparison to an empty one. They then begin to discuss the politics of the University's statements about protecting their 'student experience'. Amira suggested that the student experience wasn't really about the parties, the nightclubs, the gym and all that, but about whether you actually received a reply to your email or feedback on your work in less than a month. She complained about all the unpleasant bureaucratic procedures you had to go through just to get here to do with visa applications. She questioned whether the University really had any duty of care whatsoever. George said he'd heard students from another university ironically saying that the 'student experience' means having a fence built around their accommodation which made them feel like a prisoner.

In this first scenario, the EAP practitioner's assignment follows a tradition of ethnographically observing and analysing the language and social interactions within university environments. An iconic example is Swales' (1998) *Other Floors, Other Voices* which he describes as a 'textography' of a small University of Michigan building. However, two key differences are that in the scenarios the students are ethnographers and the possibilities for what to observe have been expanded beyond textually mediated social interaction. Clearly, the results of a small-scale ethnographic assignment such as this will not yield anywhere near the same depth as the three-year study by Swales.

However, the limited ethnographic task assigned by the EAP practitioner opened a space in class for students to discuss their daily life and their observations, and this experience was retained by Amira well beyond the class.

With this acquiring of an ethnographic eye, Amira mentally returned to the discussion at different times as she believed it demonstrated the importance of reading an environment, analysing social interactions and seeing greater complexity.

Mentioning the assignment to Mani and George allowed for further reflection and comparison of some of the stark differences between their reality and the University's discourse of 'the student experience'. Amira, Mani and George challenge the commercialized positioning of the student experience as it does not reflect their own experiences over the year, and in refusing to conform they subsequently reconstruct their own meaning of the term, crucially drawing upon what has been excluded. Amira's comment which noted what she had learned through discussing the students' ethnographic observations challenges accepted notions of what, where, how, why and when learning occurs at university. It suggests the need for a more holistic understanding of what students experience at university and how that contributes to the learning process, as opposed to a positivist commodification of academic knowledge and student progress where learning is 'delivered' to students via online lectures through 'knowledge' that is separate from the students' lives and deposited in their minds in a 'banking model' of education (Freire, 2007).

Scenario 2: Deepening understanding of academic malpractice discourse and practice

George was sharing some feedback he had recently received on an essay. One of the comments that his subject lecturer made was that the work was not properly referenced and that he should consult his EAP tutor. George expected to get at least one EAP support appointment per semester, so he planned to find out where he was going wrong. Amira commented sarcastically that at least they didn't charge him with academic malpractice. Mani said that he knew someone who has been charged with plagiarism and they had to go before a committee and take an online course on academic malpractice and then redo the assessment but with the mark capped at the lowest pass mark.

Mani was also unhappy because he knew a few other people who referenced in almost the same way in their essay. In one case the lecturer hadn't even noticed, and they got a good grade. In another case the lecturer just wrote that they should be 'careful' with plagiarism. Amira said that she thought they just put

the work through a programme like Turnitin so that everyone would follow the same rules and procedures, but that instead you could write something that one lecturer might call plagiarism and another might say is fine. She said she'd heard so much contradictory advice about paraphrasing, referencing and avoiding plagiarism that she'd just had to work it out for herself. She did value the discussions in the EAP support classes though.

Mani suggested that George should let Amira check his work because she seemed to understand about plagiarism. Amira then protested that they weren't even allowed to read each other's assessed work because of the University proofreading policy. George and Mani hadn't heard about this. They said that surely they were encouraged to read each other's work in the same way that academics do. Amira said the only place where you get to talk about these things and look at examples of good and bad referencing are in EAP classes. She said that they were not remedial classes as some people thought, but they provided a chance to think and talk about language, the decisions they made in their writing. Even the EAP tutor would talk about how the decision to send a student to an academic malpractice committee was difficult for them.

After some thought, Amira told them one reason why perhaps she seemed to 'know' things was because she'd got used to looking around to help her understand how to survive in a 'foreign' university. She said she made it her business to go to seminar presentations and notice how experienced researchers referred to each other, and how her lecturers referred to other research in their classes. Though Covid-19 didn't allow this now, her older sister had told her to really make the most of talking to lecturers in their offices just to see how they spoke and related to the books on their shelves. George said that this really made him think. After all, this university life might be just as 'foreign' to him as it was to her. He then remembered that in one of his classes, the lecturer had been talking about ethnography and how researchers should try and look through the eyes of strangers.

Amira said that she now understood more about the ethnographic skills she brought with her because of how her EAP tutor had drawn her attention to them.

In this scenario through actively comparing their own experiences and observations to University statements and policies, the students are building their own knowledge and coming to an understanding that the University approach to academic malpractice is not only uneven, but can be presented in legalistic terms which assumes universal understanding and does little to stimulate discussion or invite interpretation from those most affected by the

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policy. Similarly, policy documents avoid any mention of discrepancies in the interpretation and enforcement of academic malpractice. This contrasts with the students' experience and their feeling that these policies are difficult to navigate.

The positive to be drawn from this scenario is Amira's experience with the EAP classes and how they help her to understand the ethnographic skills she has brought with her. In explaining these she is keen to reposition the idea that these classes are remedial or for 'international students'. She sees these as a valuable way of encouraging critical language awareness (Fairclough, 1992) and making academic and language practices more visible (Bond, 2020). The discussions in these classes allow for a sharing of knowledge as the EAP practitioner learns which areas the students are finding difficult and by entering into dialogue with students, the students learn that academic malpractice decisions are difficult for staff as well. These positive exchanges can partially help to alleviate the underlining dynamic of the EAP practitioner being framed as a 'language fixer' as seen in the scenario where George is advised to consult the EAP teacher.

The students' developing personal ethnographic approach follows one of its main tenets, that of 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). This enables them to interconnect instances about University malpractice policies from a variety of sources which include the experiences of other students in their classes, weighing that up against their own experience and also with what they are being told in different subject classes by different lecturers and then comparing these with a more centralized top-down policy document from the University. They are looking beyond the language of a policy document and are identifying discrepancies between what is stated and what they see happening. This allows students to be attuned to the hidden ideology within language as found in, for example, student-facing policy documents and how that language positions them. This active engagement and questioning, which the EAP practitioner recognizes as important, shares key features with ethnography, critical discourse analysis and experiential learning.

Scenario 3: The internationalization campaign

It should also be noted that in this and the previous scenario, the EAP practitioner is located within a specific subject area with the aim of helping students with discipline specific issues which they encounter. This is not a structure used consistently in EAP across UK HE.

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Amira, Mani and George were discussing their online EAP support class which was designed to help students plan for an upcoming essay on basic concepts in international relations.

The EAP tutor had reiterated a point that the students' subject lecturer had made about not taking political statements at face value and the discussion quickly broadened out to how there are many types of statements encountered in daily life that need to be critically interrogated. One student in class had given the example of the University's 'internationalization' campaign which suddenly got a lot of discussion going. Rather than shut the discussion down and return immediately to international relations theory, the EAP tutor agreed that the process for critically analysing an organisation's use of a term such as internationalisation is not so different from analysing how a government might espouse a notion such as democracy or human rights. The tutor said the onus was on observers to consider 'actions versus rhetoric' and that identifying the discrepancies was part of a critical analytical process. The tutor went on to say that since the topic of the University's internationalization campaign generated so much discussion and was a well-known context, she proposed that students spend a couple of weeks ethnographically exploring where, when and how this term was used for further discussion in their next seminar and the students had agreed.

George reflected on what Amira had said about direct ethnographic observation and thought that what the three of them had already experienced was perhaps the best topic to investigate. Mani searched for an email which was relevant to the discussion in class. He remembered it was a perfect example because it was part of the university's internationalization campaign and it invited international students to record a message about where they were from and what it means to study at the University as global citizens.

Amira was getting quite agitated because she thought that it shouldn't just be so-labelled 'international students' who needed to think about being global citizens. She felt that she was already quite 'global' because of how far she'd had to travel in all sorts of ways. She also suspected that what the University was thinking about was to ask students to display something which superficially represented their 'home culture' or their national colours or flag. Mani said that this was why he'd deleted the email and that anyway he wouldn't be sure of what to display. He said the places where he felt most comfortable were airports and train stations, but he didn't think that made him a 'global citizen'. Amira was so angry. She said that the letter presumes that they were the walking embodiments of some sort of narrow image of their country's singular culture and that the University was just trying to create some kind of happy shiny image of itself through silly

stereotypes. George followed her thinking and said that it was as though only international students 'have culture'. He said that the term Amira needed to use was 'essentialist', but she suggested that perhaps 'racist' was better.

Mani wondered what would happen if a student recorded some of the stuff that they'd really been going through this year, e.g. his thwarted plan to get a job to help pay his fees, and how many students had gone to the newly opened food bank. He felt that the email just felt like just another form of branding – of people and of their experience – asking them to commodify themselves for the University's benefit.

The students' discussion identifies the University's attempt to carefully manage an image of international students which can be used for further marketing purposes. This image jars with the students' realities partially because it constructs international students as reduced products of a 'national culture'. Although it does not require the uniquely mobile background of Mani to show how reductionist this message is, his personal trajectory clearly highlights its failings. Similarly, the students are also sceptical about the University's use of 'global citizenship', seeing it as a buzzword which does not reflect their own experiences and observations over the year. Although the students do not name discourses per se, for example, 'West as Steward' (Holliday and Amadasi, 2020), by taking issue with the ideology unpinning the notion of global citizenship and internationalization, they demonstrate an awareness of the very tangled discourses which are mobilized by the University. Amira's reference to race may have seemed extreme, but does resonate with literature that associates cultural profiling with racism (e.g. Spears, 1999).

Writing about these discourses, Pais and Costa (2020: 11) argue that the neoliberal discourse which emphasizes 'individual achievement' and 'self-investment' has overtaken the discourse of 'critical democracy' and that '[w]hat remains understated in the discourse around global citizenship education is the eminent subordination of education to the needs of the market'. Furthermore, what this particular pandemic year has revealed is that many students like Mani, Amira and George have experienced the harsher realities of the market and the historic shift to an economic model where universities are heavily dependent on student fees and particularly higher international fees has led to growing resentment.

After a fortnight the students returned to their online seminar class to discuss the task which they had been given. Other students had brought in various materials as data sources including photographs and the students had been

> discussing the genre of the examples and their resonance with advertising. Mani showed the email which he received from the internationalisation campaign and made what he felt to be quite a strong statement – about how insulting it was to be treated like cash cows and then to be asked to smile and present a silly image of 'our culture' for marketing purposes.
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> Not all students agreed with Mani's statement and one student remarked that she didn't mind having her picture on a University campaign because she could send it to her parents and they'd be proud that she was in the publicity.
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> What then surprised some of the students was that the EAP tutor joined the discussion and said that she sometimes felt complicit in this commercialised environment. She said that she knew colleagues who felt pressured to 'sell' their courses to prospective applicants and that she and other colleagues were on very short-term teaching contracts that were a form of casual labour. Some of the students were very surprised and the discussion continued until one student who was looking a bit disgruntled asked a question about what this had to do with academic writing.
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> Rather than answer directly, the tutor asked the students for their ideas about this question and Amira was first to reply. She said that everything that they were doing here was helping them to learn not just about the University, but about each other. She said that she knew more about the University and her teachers than she did two weeks before, and that hopefully her teacher knew more about her students.
>
> Amira said that she'd also sharpened the critical eye that, and she emphases, she already had, and learnt more about how she could apply it to her own work in analysing the type of writing that they were expected to produce and in making decisions about her own writing and her own voice. She laughed and noted for example that she wouldn't be using the style of writing in the internationalisation examples in her academic essays. She finished by saying there was a definite connection to academic writing and even beyond that as she had even begun to imagine changes to improve the University.

Three interconnected issues emerge from this scenario. First, the somewhat controversial decision of the EAP practitioner to reveal her contractual arrangement with the University and her stance towards what she sees as marketization in HE. This decision in many ways runs counter to trends in HE to depersonalize and depoliticize learning and to stick to a business-as-usual approach which emphasizes neatness and efficiency. 'Coming out' in this way

in class can potentially place the EAP practitioner in a compromising position with respect to both her students and employer. The precarity that the EAP practitioner discloses also reflects increasing academic casualization which resonates with what Ding and Bruce (2017) see as the marginal position of EAP in HE. It should also be recognized, though, that not all students in this scenario object to the increasing commoditization of the University and see this as a system which they are committed to as it is expected to provide them a form of capital that ensures future prosperity.

The second issue concerns the student who thinks this critical discussion in class gets in the way of learning about 'nuts and bolts' of academic writing. This connects with the view that EAP practitioners are just 'language fixers' employed to teach and correct grammar. In this chapter we are very much arguing that, instead, it is only by taking an ethnographic approach to how academic writing is located within the wider discourses of the university and indeed society, that the EAP practitioner can narrow the gap between text and context (Lillis, 2008; James, 2018) and highlight the message that academic writing is about much more than grammar. This is a point which Amira clearly appreciates, even though it is not immediately accepted by all students.

Lastly, Amira's final statement which demonstrates a commitment to reshaping the University is salient. Critical examinations and ethnographic observations of institutions and social interactions do not always lend themselves to optimistic interpretations but can rather fall into cynicism. Yet, Amira retains a commitment to how things might be made better to reshape her environment and this is at the heart of criticality.

Conclusion: Ethnography as social theory for EAP

There are two overlapping layers in the creative non-fiction scenarios with respect to ethnography as a social theory for EAP. Firstly, the scenarios can be treated as part of an empirical study which allows us to make direct observations of what goes on between students and practitioners in terms of how they make sense of each other and what they are learning in the wider context of institutional and cultural environments. Interviews with students or practitioners or class evaluations would not do this because they would not get to the between-the-lines thinking or factors that might not be thought to be relevant.

In this chapter we have shown a facet of how this can work. It is thick description that allows us to look and make connections beyond the obvious.

The creative non-fiction we have provided only scratches the surface, however. In a more extensive study, we would need also to look at ourselves as researchers to de-centre the gaze that we bring to making sense of the people we portray by interrogating our prejudices, e.g. derived from our own positions within the neoliberal university. Also, the thick description would go on to connect with other times and other places. The scenarios allow us to point to emergent findings which include that the 'international student' label continues to be overly used in problematic ways and that within a neoliberal environment efforts aimed at helping international students can often make matters worse. We have nevertheless been able to demonstrate that students are critically aware of the discrepancies between marketized discourse and their own experience, even if they do not universally object to this framing of education.

The second layer is the suggestion of further ethnographic possibilities in EAP, not as a 'how to guide', but as specific examples which highlight the shift within the EAP pedagogy by the practitioner towards ethnography and where students were encouraged to develop an ethnographic eye.

We do not claim that this is easy, particularly given that the emphasis on greater 'efficiencies' in HE will render ethnographic engagement impractical primarily due to the time required to achieve sufficient depth of study. We also acknowledge the spatial and temporal changes which are ongoing across university campuses as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it is important to balance the degree of engagement which is necessary to 'count' as ethnography against the practicalities which students face during their studies.

In stating that 'true' ethnography is a rarity, Blommaert (2018: 1) rightly takes exception to ethnography being considered as simply a method for collecting data and he stresses that it is important that the epistemological and ontological principles of ethnography be adhered to. Following this lead, we suggest that ethnographically informed work in EAP is possible by adhering to these principles about ethnography:

a) a way of seeing which is not just another method, but which embodies an epistemology that is concerned with how *all* involved parties, including the university and other institutions, construct meanings;
b) allowing meanings and methods to emerge from the observed nature of settings rather than beginning with definitions – e.g. regarding the nature of writing and of learning how to write; and
c) noticing the emerging process of how all parties respond within and to the research event.

d) Employing thick description to interconnect meanings across subjective instances of action.

Finally, the starting point for retaining the value of an ethnographic approach on a smaller scale is recognizing that ethnography 'involves a perspective on language and communication, including ontology and epistemology, both of which are of significance for the study of language in society, or better, of language as well as of society' (Blommaert, 2018: 2).

With reference to social theory, an example of the unexpected that can emerge from the implicit de-centring of ethnography, where researchers, educators and students can be taken beyond their thinking-as-usual, is that especially Amira is bringing her own social theory about the politics of writing and the university. That the EAP tutor emerges as being able to recognize and respond positively to this is a tribute to the mediated positioning between institution and student that this role surely requires.

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