

Tensions in a Class Space: An Exploration of the Academic Writing Class as a Site of Cognitive (In)justices

Joanne Struch
The University of Winnipeg

Abstract:

First-year academic writing classes are spaces of transition; they are charged with helping students transform from relative novices in academic discourse and practices to potential participants in this discourse. This means that a dominant episteme, and representation of this episteme, is necessarily privileged in these spaces. However, academic writing class spaces intersect with another complex aspect of the university: its increasing diversity. A global transnational reality and the internationalization agendas of North American universities means that students in these classes may bring non-dominant knowledges to these academic writing classes. In the convergence of the academic writing space with this diversity there is a tension that is related to cognitive justice, a concept which considers “conceptions of knowledge...what it means to know...what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge is produced” (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007, p. xxi). In this paper, I explore cognitive justice in the academic writing class. From my perspective as an academic writing instructor, I set the academic writing course in relation to theories of cognitive (in)justices, specifically Santos’ (2007a) *abyssal thinking* and Fricker’s (2007, 2008) *epistemic injustice*, in order to understand how cognitive injustices are present in this space. Then, drawing on Santos’ (2007a) *ecology of knowledges* I consider the possibilities and limitations, in academic writing classes, of post-abyssal thinking and of movement toward epistemic justice. This examination reveals that there is more work to be done in understanding how theories of cognitive (in)justices can be enacted in these spaces.

Tensions in a Class Space

The academic writing class is a complex space within the university, primarily because the content of the class is academia – the discourse, processes and practices associated with generating knowledge in academic settings. These are courses in which students receive explicit instruction in “learning to think like a scholar” (Rogers & Taylor, 2011, p. vii). In American universities “first-year composition” is often a required course (Schaffer, 2014), and although *composition* is a less frequently used term for these courses in Canadian universities¹, many offer a course which serves as a similar transition to the academy. Various called “Introduction to University” (University of Manitoba, 2015), “Academic Reading and Writing” (University of Victoria, 2015), and “Writing Studies” (University of Prince Edward Island, 2015) these courses are designed to “help students make the transition to university” and include discussions of “academic writing and research skills” (University of Manitoba, 2015)². At the institution where I teach, this

¹ As O’Brien-Moran and Soiferman (2010) point out, while the U.S. has a history of “first-year composition” courses that are “taken by almost every first-year student in the United States” (p. 4), Canadian universities take varied approaches to this type of course, including the department or faculty where the course is housed. Clary-Lemon (2009) also notes that “the development of rhetoric and composition as a discipline in Canada has had an entirely different set of exigencies and institutional outcomes than in the United States” (p. 94), including the type of attention paid to academic writing courses.

² A brief survey of the websites of various Canadian universities indicates that in addition to the universities mentioned here, the following universities also have academic writing or introduction to university classes as part of the degree requirement or as part of the first-year “experience”: Dalhousie University (Dalhousie University, 2015), Memorial University (Memorial University, 2015) and the University of British Columbia (University of British Columbia, 2015). For the purposes of this paper, I will use “Academic Writing” as an umbrella term for these courses, acknowledging that the details of individual courses may be different than the course examples that I am using in this paper.

course, called “Academic Writing,” fulfills the writing requirement for an undergraduate degree³. It is described in the course calendar as dealing with “the essential strategies for university writing and research,” which include “the discovery of topics, the arrangement of ideas, the assessment of audience and purpose, and the practice of effective editing” (The University of Winnipeg, 2016). These topics and activities position this course as a space where student “knowledge and practices must be transformed” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12) so that these students can participate with some agency in a post-secondary setting. First-year writing classes, then, are spaces of transition; they are charged with helping students transform from relative novices in academic discourse to potential participants in discourse communities who are conversant in the language of those communities. These courses have a role in shaping the ways in which students consume and produce knowledge in post-secondary settings and are spaces where students “are in the process of changing from one status to another” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 11) in complex ways. This complexity is reflected in ideas and research about what happens in this space – the methods, modes, resources and pedagogies that facilitate the transformation.

A goal of the academic writing class is not only to introduce students to academic discourse and practices but also to help students become conversant in a dominant academic discourse and in ways of representing knowledge that are “in the code that we are expected to share in academic circumstances for communication” (Kuokkanen, 2008, p. 63). This means that a dominant episteme, and representation of this episteme, is necessarily privileged in these classes. Yet, these academic writing spaces intersect with another complex aspect of the university: its increasing diversity. The transnational and transglobal reality of the world – the “crossing of cultural, ideological, linguistic, and geopolitical borders and boundaries of all types” (Duff, 2015, p. 57) – coupled with the

³ The writing requirement or an exemption must be fulfilled before the student enrolls in the 42nd credit hour.

ambitious internationalization agendas of many North American universities means that students in these classes are multilingual or plurilingual. Marshall and Moore (2013) suggest that plurilingual students can be considered “social actor[s]” who represent “various languages and varieties of languages and *different forms of knowledge*” (p. 474, emphasis added). This means that students may bring knowledges to these academic writing classes, which foreground the dominant episteme, that are non-dominant.

There is a tension, I think, in what happens in the convergence of these complex academic writing courses and diverse spaces that has to do with *cognitive justice*, a concept that considers “conceptions of knowledge...what it means to know...what counts as knowledge and how that knowledge is produced” (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007, p. xxi). The tension, for me, arises when I consider what happens to the “different forms of knowledge,” linguistic or otherwise, that students bring to the space. Bartholomae (1986, p. 20) has argued that progress through the academic writing space is “marked by [students’] abilities to take on the role of privilege, by their abilities to establish authority” in their writing. But what happens to non-dominant knowledges in the process of a transition to a “role of privilege”? Is it lost, sidelined or changed in the transitional space of the academic writing class? What happens to those students who are not willing to give up their non-dominant knowledges for a role of privilege and authority in a dominant episteme? In short, is there a type of *injustice* – related to the transitional nature of the academic writing class and these different types of knowledges – at play in this space?

As an academic writing instructor with a background in second language teaching, I have felt this tension many times in the classroom space: when I consider my response to the student who asks to use a Chinese language source in her essay; when I suggest that certain types of sources are more appropriate for use in academic writing than others; when I teach in a program that insists English-as-Additional-Language students use “English only” because it will

improve their language skills. The tension that I recognize in these moments raises a number of questions about language, knowledge and my role in this space. How is academic discourse perceived by my students in academic writing classes? What is my role in inducting these students into the language of the academy? Beyond linguistic considerations, what does it mean that these students bring “different forms of knowledge” (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474) to my classes? To what extent is the singular purpose of these courses to induct students into a singular way of thinking – “global linear thinking” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 19) – that privileges Western knowledge over non-Western knowledges?

Kuokkanen (2008) calls on the academy to “take a critical look at its own discourses and assumptions” (p. 60) to uncover and address injustice related to knowledge and knowledge practices. In what follows, I respond, in part, to that challenge by exploring cognitive (in)justices in the space of the academic writing class. In order to do this, I will first explain how I am conceptualizing the term “cognitive (in)justices.” Then, from my position as an academic writing instructor, and using examples from my own courses as a type of case study, I will detail this class space. I will then set the academic writing course in relation to theories of cognitive (in)justices, specifically Santos’ (2007a) *abyssal thinking* and Fricker’s (2007, 2008) *epistemic injustice*, in order to understand how cognitive (in)justices are present in this space. Finally, drawing on Santos’ (2007a) *ecology of knowledges* I will consider the possibilities and limitations, in academic writing classes, of post-abyssal thinking, of a movement toward epistemic justice. This examination reveals that there is more work to be done in understanding how theories of cognitive (in)justices can be enacted in the academic writing class space.

Conceptualizing Cognitive (In)justices

There are a number of different ways in which theorists term considerations of knowledge and justice, including cognitive justice (Guilherme, 2014; Santos, 2007a, 2007b; Santos, Nunes & Meneses,

2007; Visvanathan, 2009), epistemic justice (Code, 2014; Fricker, 2008), epistemic responsibility (Code, 1987), epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2008) and epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen, 2008). For this paper, the assertion by Santos, Nunes & Meneses (2007), now oft-quoted, that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice” (p. ix), is a basis for the conceptualization of cognitive justice. As a response to the “negative impact of Western science on developing countries” (van der Velden, 2005, p. 115), this assertion of cognitive justice is based in the idea that the epistemological diversity of the world is just as immense as its cultural diversity (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007), and therefore considerations of “justice” in varied settings must include not only social justice but also epistemological justice. Concepts of cognitive justice promote “non-relativistic dialogues among knowledges” that are aimed at maximizing the contributions of these knowledges to “build a more democratic and just society” and to “decolonize knowledge and power” (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007, p. xx). So, along with recognizing the “right of different forms of knowledge to co-exist,” a “global cognitive justice” goes beyond “tolerance or liberalism to an active recognition of the need for diversity” (Visvanathan, 2009, n.p.). This is different from the “contested concept” of multiculturalism, which implies a “description of cultural differences and the ways in which they interrelate” (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007, p. xxii) and is associated with policies that are imposed by the nation-state. In this paper, I use the term cognitive (in)justices to acknowledge that both justice and injustice are concepts that are inherent to understanding knowledge and justice in a given setting. That is, it is necessary to acknowledge injustices in order to move toward justice. The pluralization of the term acknowledges that there is not one, singular, concept of “cognitive justice,” but that there are many intersecting concepts that can inform considerations of knowledge and justice.

The First-year Academic Writing Space: A Description

Purdy and Walker (2013) argue that the first-year composition class marks “a boundary between the inside and the outside of the

academy” (p. 11). Therefore this class is tasked with introducing students to the work of academia. Although this introduction may be enacted differently in the specific pedagogy of each classroom space, within institutions (and generally) there has to be a certain agreement about the definition of this discourse, otherwise there would be no need for these classes. In the department in which I teach, for example, descriptions of the academic writing courses taught by various instructors, not surprisingly because they are based on departmental academic writing outcomes, present similar descriptions of this transitional space. These descriptions emphasize “organisation, argumentation” as activities in the class (Department of Rhetoric and Communications, 2015, p. 8), “skills to determine accuracy, authority, objectivity and relevance of sources” (Department of Rhetoric and Communications, 2015, p. 13), “the correct use of critical thinking in academic writing” (Department of Rhetoric and Communications, 2015, p. 15) and the writing of “a research paper requiring the application of all the skills and strategies learned in class” (Department of Rhetoric and Communications, 2015, p. 13). In my own course outline, the objectives are “to identify, understand and appropriately use elements of academic writing,” “to think critically about evidence and sources in order to develop an argument” and “to properly document sources” (Struch, 2016). The objectives of these courses suggest that activities and skills are ones that are not yet part of the student’s repertoire. The language used in these descriptions – “appropriate,” “properly,” “correct” – suggests that a certain type of knowledge, or at least a certain way of representing knowledge, is at the heart of these courses in order to transform students into players who have agency in academic discourse.

These spaces, though, are also complex diverse spaces. A transnational reality – the “crossing of cultural, ideological, linguistic, and geopolitical borders and boundaries of all types” (Duff, 2015, p. 57) – linked to globalization means that academic writing classes bring together people who have literally crossed borders to get there (international, immigrant and refugee students)

and those who have figuratively done so through, among other things, digital practices that make information about the world accessible. With an urban, downtown location and a diverse student body, including indigenous, international, and immigrant and refugee student populations, the university where I teach, for example, brings together “students and teachers of different races, genders, sexualities, classes, abilities, nationalities, and linguistic backgrounds” (Neigh, 2014, p. 71). Pratt (1991) has called this type of space, “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (p. 34), a contact zone. Neigh (2014) considers these diverse university spaces borderland⁴ spaces where the people within them need to “find ways to communicate with each other” (p. 71) in ways that recognize this diversity. While each of these characterizations of this space, including critiques of them⁵, bears more investigation than is possible here, these metaphors provide a way of conceptualizing the complexity of this transnational reality; these spaces are not only “diverse” but require the negotiation of language, culture and knowledges in difficult and challenging ways.

One of the main, and concrete, ways that academic writing spaces manifest the repertoire of knowledges of the individuals in them is

⁴ Neigh’s characterization of universities as borderland spaces starts with Andalzua’s suggestion that borderland spaces are present “whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (quoted in Neigh, 2014, p. 71). She uses the characterization of the space in this way to question how the use of multilingual poems in her class can “disrupt hierarchies of fluency in mainstream US English so that first-language speakers of English do not dominate discussions or have a privileged subject position in relation to knowledge” (p. 79).

⁵ While Pratt’s contact zone has become a metaphor for theorists and researchers who consider what happens in these spaces (for example, Canagarajah, 2013; Lu, 1994; Seror, 2008), it has not been without criticism. Hall & Rosner (2004), for example, critique this conceptualization, especially as it relates to the field of composition studies.

through linguistic diversity. Taylor and Snodden (2013) call this plurilingualism, which is a “superdiversity of languages” that is linked to “variation in individual linguistic repertoires” (p. 440). Bizzell’s (2014) description of the repertoire of languages in her classes fits mine as well: for students, one language might be the one they spoke from birth “but never learned to write”; another could be a language, used as an official language for business or schooling in their homeland “which they can write well but not speak fluently”; a third could be a language that they encountered in popular music or online of which they have only “a little comprehension” (p. 132). Linguistic diversity in the academic writing class, then, does not necessarily mean the crossing of one boundary – a direct translation from one language to another – but can involve a number of complex relationships with languages and therefore, potentially, also knowledges.

Exploring Cognitive (In)justices in the Academic Writing Class: Abyssal Thinking and Epistemic Injustice

The academic writing course objectives described in the previous section can be characterized as what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007a) calls *abyssal thinking*. This is a system of visible and invisible distinctions that are established through “radical lines” and by placing social reality into two categories – “this side of the line” and “the other side of the line” (Santos, 2007a, p. 1). For Santos (2007a), “this side of the line” “vanishes as reality becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent” (p. 1). This non-existence is not relevant or comprehensible and is “radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion,” determined by the epistemological dominance on “this side of the line.” Although the position of the line is not necessarily fixed, what “fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line” (Santos, 2007a, p. 1). Essentially, “this side of the line” is characterized by a blindness to alternate epistemologies; there is no possibility on “this side of the line” for a co-existence with other ideologies. He suggests that the “monopoly” given to modern science to make the “universal

distinction” between “true and false” (p. 2) has become the basis for “modern epistemological disputes” (Santos, 2007a, p. 2) between these scientific forms of truth and non-scientific forms of truth such as philosophy and theology. Santos (2007a) contends that although “tensions” between these forms of truth are highly visible, these disputes take place on “this side of the line” and are based on “the invisibility of forms of knowledge that cannot be fitted into any of these ways of knowing” such as “popular, lay, plebeian, peasant, or indigenous knowledges” that are on the “other side of the line” (p. 2). The premise of the academic writing course – to introduce students to the ways in which academic work takes place in a Western university context – ensures that it is rooted in abyssal thinking. The transitional nature of this space, described by Purdy and Walker (2013) as the threshold to the “‘new world’ of the academy” (p. 11), even invokes the coloniality in which abyssal thinking is rooted.

Beyond the purposes and objectives of the academic writing course, the activities (and assignments) that take place in this space in order to enact the transformation of the student can also be examined through a cognitive (in)justices lens. An example of this is the attention to research⁶ in these courses. In my own course, for example, one of the major assignments is a research paper. To support this assignment, activities in the class are dedicated to various aspects of research: finding, evaluating and documenting sources, taking notes from sources, synthesizing information from sources, developing an argument based on the sources and integrating sources into writing. Throughout the second part of the course, students think about a controversial topic that they would like to research. They think about what claim they would like to make about that controversy and search for the sources related to the topic. As students find these sources, class discussions centre on what

⁶ Here, I am using the term research as a general phrase to mean methods for finding, reading, analyzing and writing about published scholarly sources; it doesn't include any introduction to specific qualitative or quantitative methods of research “in the field.”

constitutes an “appropriate” source for an academic essay. Writing textbooks, which I have used in my classes and that are in use in my department, suggest that students consider what the reader, “especially [the] professor,” will “expect” (Soles, 2014, p. 36) of appropriate sources: ones that “lend that aura of authority” (Soles, 2014, p. 36) to an essay because they are mainly peer reviewed, scholarly books and journal articles, not popular sources which can “stimulate thinking” about the topic, but which are “not appropriate for use in an academic essay” (Rogers & Taylor, 2011, p. 115).

Throughout the research process, students work with the sources through reading, discussing and writing. A portion of the class is also dedicated to the ways in which writers develop arguments – Aristotle's concepts of logos pathos and ethos, Toulminian and Rogerian forms of argumentation, for example – and attention is given to logical fallacies. In addition, students might be taught how to “handle” (Rogers & Taylor, 2011, p. 117) opposing perspectives within these arguments. During the course, I also provide students with examples of essays, ones that I consider “well-written and informative” (Soles, 2014, p. 193), that represent “the disciplinary genre conventions enacted within scholarly publications” (Rogers & Taylor, 2011, p. vii) as a basis for discussion about the structure, rhetorical features and development of academic essays. The process – and presumably the student’s time in the transitional space – culminates in the student writing an essay in which they demonstrate that their writing practices, and they themselves, have transformed.

This process of research as it takes place in my academic writing class is a relatively linear one. Although there is some recursive movement – back and forth between texts, for example – the goal of the process is to “create knowledge” through a sort of “ordering and control” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 391) of the process; the research essay is the culmination of this “ordering.” Purdy & Walker (2013) also discuss research in composition classes as a “closed, linear, universal process” (p. 10). In their examination of the ways in which composition textbooks “construct” students in introductory

composition classes as researchers, they suggest that the “need” for students to make the transition to successful actors in post-secondary institutions is “represented forcefully” (p. 12) in those books. Their study revealed that the texts “provide a focus for the institution’s desire to control and direct students’ movement into the established practices of research that academics use to construct students’ knowledge making, their learning spaces, and themselves” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12). They argue that in controlling and directing students’ movements in the “established practices of research,” the processes for teaching this research do not take into consideration the “range of research practices” that students already have (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12). They suggest that these students are not “empty vessels,” but are “brimming over with knowledge about how to find things” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12). While their focus is primarily on the knowledge of online and electronic resources that their students have, their contention that “academic research practices need to be connected to students’ existing practices rather than set up as wholly separate from...them” (Purdy & Walker, 2013, p. 12) might equally be made of any existing research knowledges that students bring to the class.

While linear processes and ordering and control are not necessarily negative qualities in and of themselves, it is possible to question a uniform pedagogy for creating “new knowledge” in a space where “different forms of knowledge” (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474) are brought to the class by the plurilingual, multicultural and diverse students in it. The particular process that I have described above suggests a type of abyssal thinking. The use of modes of argumentation that are based in Western ideas – Aristotle, Toulmin, Roger – and the need for “controversial debates” (Andreotti, Ahenakew & Cooper, 2011) in which opposition is “handled” are also premised on ignoring the “other side of the line.”

In addition, this disconnect between students’ existing research practices and the ways in which research is taught in this space can be considered what Fricker (2008) calls *epistemic injustice*, a concept

that constitutes “being wronged in one's capacity as a knower” (p. 67). Epistemic injustice considers what failing to recognize other-than-dominant ways of knowing means for day-to-day human interactions by starting from the position that there are ethical aspects to be considered in “two of our most basic everyday epistemic practices: conveying knowledge to others by telling them, and making sense of our own social practices” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Fricker (2007) outlines two “distinctly epistemic” forms of injustice – testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice – as occurring, fundamentally, “in a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (p. 1). Testimonial injustice occurs when “prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1) and is influenced by identity power: depending on the “collective conception of the social identities at play,” this judgement can prevent the speaker from “conveying knowledge” (p. 28) because the prejudice of the hearer does not acknowledge the speaker's identity as a “knower.” Ignoring students' existing knowledges about writing and research, though perhaps unintentionally, in favour of a singular concept – whether that be forms of argumentation, appropriateness of sources or examples of essays – is questioning our students' capacities as knowers.

While as “hearers” we may not be intentionally “prejudicially deflating” the degree of credibility of our students by ignoring their previous knowledges about research processes, the location of the exchange on “this side of the line” may constitute a hermeneutical injustice. This is “the lived experience of being unfairly disadvantaged in rendering one's social experiences intelligible, to others and possibly even to oneself” (Fricker, 2008, p. 70). Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a “gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker, 2007, p. 1), and is usually associated with unequal power structures. This means that in order to “make sense of their social experiences” the powerful have “appropriate understandings of their experiences to draw on”

(Fricker, 2007, p. 148), while the powerless may find themselves with “ill-fitting meanings to draw on” (p.148) in the effort to make their experiences intelligible. So hermeneutical injustice is discriminatory in that it consists of “having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding” due to one’s identity in a social group (Fricker, 2007, p. 155). The location of some of my students’ lived experiences or conceptualizations of research that are on “the other side of the line,” because of their linguistic or cultural backgrounds, may be invisible in my classes, which can result in these students being wronged in their capacities as knowers.

A final element of this space that can be examined in relation to cognitive (in)justices is the language(s) used in it. In my academic writing classes, because the objectives of these courses are to enculturate students into academic discourse in an English-language university, the language in use is English: it is the medium of instruction and the language of the examples of “model essays” provided for students, the sources that students study for their research and the student essays themselves. Even as students learn how to “acknowledge the sources from which they have borrowed information” (Soles, 2014, p. 147), there is no instruction for how to document sources in languages other than English. And in the “model essays” in the textbooks that I have used there are no examples included of essays that have used sources other than English ones⁷. Monolingualism, then, is an imperative. This imperative creates a hierarchical divide between the knowledge brought by students who speak other languages – whether fluently or as a part of their linguistic repertoire – and the knowledge that is implicit in academic discourse in English. This monolingual imperative doesn’t take into

⁷ Although there are provisions within MLA and APA style guides (the main styles that I discuss in my classes) that indicate how to cite sources in languages other than English, none of the resources that I have used in my classes (textbooks, library resource guides) indicate how this should be done or give examples of sources that are in languages other than English.

consideration the student as a knower – the “different forms of knowledge” (Marshall & Moore, 2013, p. 474) that these students have as a result of their linguistic repertoire. All of the linguistic interaction in this space is on “this side of the line.”

This examination of aspects of the space of my academic writing classes reveals a relatively hegemonic process that enacts a type of “knowledge-as-regulation” (Santos, 2007b, p. 428). To a certain extent, the goals, instruction and activities in this space potentially divest students of knowledges (like those associated with language) that are related to other-than-dominant epistemologies. Considering how this space is rooted in abyssal thinking and epistemic injustice, while acknowledging that it is necessary for students to go through this transformation in order to be successful in academic work creates a tension that we need to acknowledge. For Santos (2007a), the failure to acknowledge the existence of multiple knowledges and the systematic repression of these knowledges through colonial practices of knowledge regulation and “policing” is not only a waste of “an immense wealth of cognitive experiences” but epistemicide (p. 16). Are there ways that this tension can be transformed so that other-than-dominant epistemologies are not rendered invisible in this space? Can the abyssal line be moved? Erased? In short, how can cognitive justice be enacted in the space of the academic writing class?

Toward Cognitive Justice: An Ecology of Knowledges

The ecology of knowledges is a foundation in the assertion that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice” (Santos, Nunes & Meneses, 2007, p. ix), and therefore a framework for understanding what it means to move toward cognitive justice. In order to “break from the mono-epistemicism” (Andreotti, Ahenakew & Cooper, 2011, p. 43) associated with the abyssal thinking on “this side of the line,” Santos argues that it is necessary to recognize that no single type of knowledge is able to describe or account for “all possible interventions in the world,” so all knowledges are “incomplete in different ways” (Santos, 2007a, p. 17). In this model,

each knowledge is “insufficient” *and* “interdependent on other knowledges” (Santos, 2007a, p. 17). An ecology of knowledges allows us a “broader vision of what we do not know” and of “what we know,” and therefore to understand that what we do not know is an individual ignorance, not a “general ignorance” (Santos, 2007a, p. 18). Santos, Nunes & Meneses (2007) suggest that one of the moves towards an “emancipatory, non-relativistic, cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges” (p. xiv) requires the transition from a “monoculture of scientific knowledge” to an “ecology of knowledges” that will make possible a replacement of “knowledge-as-regulation” with “knowledge-as-emancipation” (p. li).

While the *ecology of knowledges* provides a theoretical framework for post-abysal thinking in a movement toward “global cognitive justice,” there is work to be done in interpreting this framework to enact cognitive justice in pedagogy. This is especially the case where there are tensions such as those that I have identified in my academic writing class. This space, into which students bring a variety of knowledges and where students and teachers must “find ways to communicate with each other” (Neigh, 2014, p. 71), requires a “recognition of the need for diversity” (Visvanathan, 2009, n.p.). This suggests that there are possibilities for the recognition of an ecology of knowledges. Yet the transition through this space by these students requires a transformation that necessarily assumes a dominant episteme so that they can participate in the discourses of academia. Where are the possibilities, then, in these spaces for recognition that each knowledge is “insufficient” *and* “interdependent on other knowledges” (Santos, 2007a, p. 17)? Are there spaces in which it is possible to engage in post-abysal thinking so that we are not only recognizing knowledges that lie on “this side of the line”? How is it possible to honour these diverse students’ capacities as knowers, while at the same time help them have agency in academic discourse?

Linguistics and composition scholars suggest that responding to these questions, in part, means providing alternatives to the monolingual imperative that has been a mainstay of writing instruction in North

American post-secondary settings. Though they don't name it cognitive justice, these scholars (for example, Bizzell, 2014; Canagarajah, 1999; Horner, NeCamp & Donahue, 2011; Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011; Matsuda, 2006; Trimbur, 2006) are increasingly raising questions about the implications of this monolingual imperative in their classrooms. They suggest that "traditional ways of understanding and responding to language differences" in these academic writing classes "are inadequate" in the face of both the multilingual nature of their classes and the ways in which "languages and variations are constantly changing as they intermingle" (Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011, p. 303). They advocate an approach that views language differences as a "resource for producing meaning in writing, speaking, reading, and listening" (Horner, Lu, Royster & Trimbur, 2011, p. 303) rather than as barriers to communication.

As one example, Bizzell (2014) offers a model of a translingual literacy for her first-year composition class in which she aims to "to acknowledge all students' varied linguistic identities" (Bizzell, 2014, p. 135). One of her course goals is "to learn about the contemporary English language, how it has changed over time, how it has spread across the world, and how it has interacted with other languages" (Bizzell, 2014, p. 137). She suggests that this knowledge will help the student understand his/her self "as an English language user" and therefore improve his or her "reading, writing, speaking and listening" (Bizzell, 2014, p. 137). The readings in her class address the role of English in the world and some of them "look at writers who mingle English and Spanish and Common English and African American English in their writing" (Bizzell, 2014, p. 139). In addressing multiple languages and language use in context in her class, Bizzell (2014) is acknowledging the "other side of the line." That is, she is recognizing that there are multiple methods for communication in the space of her class. However, in her description of the model, she doesn't explain if or how she engages those multiple methods for communication. The discussions that she initiates about language in her class (as well as the writing that her

students do) is in relation to “English.” That is, with a student population in her class that she terms “diverse,” (Bizzell, 2014, p. 136) she conducts the entire conversation, centred around English, on “this side of the line.” While she discusses multilingual communication, she discusses it through a certain lens – the lens of English.

Bizzell’s (2014) model suggests that part of working toward cognitive justice in the academic writing class space has to do with the languages that we engage with in our classes, such as the languages that are represented in the types of literature that we uphold as authorities as sources for research and in examples of academic essays that we present as representative of the writing that we are expecting from our students. It is necessary to consider how these “authorities” represent the lived language in this class space. At the same time, though, this model exposes the limitations to how much the “line” of abyssal thinking can be moved in this particular space, which acts as a transition to a dominant episteme. A larger question, then, is (how) can academic discourses themselves be changed so that dominant and non-dominant epistemologies can co-exist and be valued, in the space?

Conclusions

However important language is in the academic writing class space, it is not the only consideration for moving toward an ecology of knowledges. Although language is key to Santos’ (2007a) ecology of knowledges, he notes that the “most characteristic” feature of post-abyssal thinking is “intercultural translation” (p. 16) and that cognitive experiences, “embedded in different Western and non-Western cultures” do not only use different languages, “but also different categories, symbolic universes, and aspirations for a better life” (p. 16). He notes that language “enables certain ideas to be explained” but “not others” (Santos, 2007a, p. 16). In addition, Andreotti, Ahenakew & Cooper (2011) point out that on “this side” of the abyssal line “a recognition of cultural diversity does not necessarily translate into a recognition of epistemological diversity”

(p. 42). I wonder to what extent “cultural diversity” here can – or should – be read as “linguistic diversity.” Are there other ways, besides the linguistic ones noted above, in which the recognition of epistemological diversity can take place? For example, in the assessment and feedback of academic writing, or in writing assignments set in these classes.

There are also constraints outside of the academic writing class space that influence considerations of cognitive (in)justices in this space. Writing continues to be a staple of academic work and “the main assessment mechanism” (Wingate & Tribble, 2012, p. 489) for evaluating student knowledge in a field. Therefore, institutional processes related to this assessment may limit the possibilities to modify these processes in individual classes. In addition, language about academic discourse in academia itself can place constraints on the project of cognitive justice in the academic writing class. For example, in the entry on “Academic Discourse” in the *Continuum Companion to Discourse Analysis*, Hyland’s (2011) characterization of academic discourse as the “carrier of expertise and prestige – the badge of those who possess knowledge and of those who wish to” (p. 172) – perpetuates the epistemic privilege connected to academic discourse and writing. His further suggestion that the nature of academic discourse is such that it “constructs the social roles and relationships...which sustain the universities, the disciplines, and the creation of knowledge itself” (Hyland, 2011, p. 171) means that the considerations of cognitive justice in academic writing is one that also needs to move beyond the classroom.

The initial questions that I have explored here are meant as a starting point for further discussion about engaging in multiple ways of knowing and equitable epistemological exchange in a space where the requirements for participant “success” includes engaging in a singular, universal, process that is rooted in abyssal thinking and epistemic injustice and that doesn't necessarily take into consideration the necessity for alternate pathways, processes and languages for communication. More than just “introducing alternate ways of

knowing” in the way we teach research in these classes, though, we need to consider how to “engage with different epistemologies ethically, responsibly and critically without homogenising, essentialising or romanticising them” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 394). And, equally, we need to consider how to “interrupt” our assumptions so that we can “engage with other epistemologies on their own terms” (Andreotti, 2011, p. 394).

Although I have focused here on academic writing classes, it is both necessary and possible to consider other tensions between these types of spaces in the university; given the internationalization mandates of many universities, English for academic purposes and English language classes are another potential site for examination as are courses and requirements for the certification of internationally educated professionals (teachers and engineers, for example). If the “quest for epistemological exchange, balance and equity” is “currently at the centre of academic discussion and research” (Guilherme, 2014, p. 69) in contexts larger than our classrooms, we need to consider the limitations of the use of a single framework in our understanding of what it means to create “new knowledge” in academic settings.

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