Student Writing in Higher Education: New Contexts

Edited Book

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Editors’ Introduction

Mary R. Lea and Barry Stierer

In this collection we have brought together 11 articles written by practitioners-researchers working in a range of international university settings. Our broad aim has been to bring to the attention of fellow university teachers some of the exciting work currently being done in the areas of student learning and academic literacy within what we are calling new contexts for student writing in higher education. We use the term 'new contexts' to refer to two phenomena in today’s higher education. First, we have in mind the writing practices emerging within settings other than traditional ones (for example, professional training, dance, English for academic purposes, computer conferencing). We also have in mind the challenging writing practices emerging within traditional academic disciplines (for example, writing journals in anthropology, and reflective writing and empathetic writing in a number of subjects). We feel that the work emerging from these new contexts can contribute positively and significantly to our theoretical understanding of student writing in ‘new’ and ‘old’ contexts alike, as well as to the practical effectiveness of our everyday work with university students.

In assembling the book, we have been motivated by two objectives. First, in our role as university teachers and staff developers, we wish to bring the work reported in this collection to the attention of a wide audience of fellow practitioners. We believe that there are many practical implications arising from the contributions in the book which will enhance the quality of our colleagues’ everyday work with students. For this reason, each chapter features work with students that will be immediately recognizable to fellow university teachers. Moreover, we have asked each contributor to draw out from their analyses the practical implications for teaching and learning activities.

Second, we have a strong interest, as educational researchers, in what we will refer to as social practice perspectives for understanding student writing in higher education. By identifying, and bringing together, work that has been informed by these perspectives, we are seeking to show how they are yielding new insights in this field, and at the same time to show how this work serves to validate and further refine social practice perspectives. It is possible that current teaching and research activities located in new contexts are especially amenable to these social practice perspectives. However, we believe that the conceptual issues raised by these activities have a relevance in more traditional settings as well.

Background

The development of the research area of student writing in higher education is a highly topical one for two major reasons. Increasingly, in many countries, universities are becoming subjected to a process of performance audit by national and international funding bodies. As a consequence, institutions are diverting more attention to the processes of teaching and learning, and more resources to the continuing professional development of their teaching staff. As an example, the implementation of recommendations of the Bawden Committee in the UK has resulted in a national framework for the training of university lecturers in aspects of teaching and learning, leading to formal accreditation. We anticipate that issues of student writing and assessment will feature prominently in these training programmes.

At the same time, the student intake and curriculum provision in universities are changing rapidly. As a result, students are coming from an increasingly wide range of educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to study in a number of diverse learning contexts which often no longer reflect traditional academic subject boundaries with their attendant values and norms. Additionally, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning and the necessity for universities to adapt their provision to make it possible for learners to enter higher education for training and retraining at a number of different points in their lives. As a consequence of these changes in the student body, universities are increasingly offering not only ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ courses in order to help non-traditional students to cope with the demands of university study, but also new-angle courses featuring new writing and assessment practices. In parallel with these developments is a growing recognition of the importance of embedding support for student writing within the mainstream curriculum.

The contributors to this collection approach writing in higher education as a social practice (see, for example, Street 1984; 1995; Gee 1996; Lankshear 1997) which is embedded in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the cultures of academic disciplines in higher education. The social practice perspective adopted by all the contributors reflects an important conceptual shift in the study of student writing in higher education. Much of the existing work in this area approaches student writing from an essentially ‘skills-based’ perspective. That is, writing in higher education is assumed to be a competence which, once acquired, enables students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in virtually any context. The qualities of ‘good writing’ are assumed to be self-evident, and largely a matter of learning and mastering universal rules of, for example, grammar, usage and text organization. Explanations for students who experience problems with writing (and tend to locate the problem as a deficit in the student rather than question the way in which the ground rules of academic writing become established and negotiated in particular academic contexts. This traditional ‘skills-based’ approach is manifest most clearly in the growing tendency to confine the teaching of writing to marginal ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ units, casting largely for students deemed to be non-traditional. The papers in this collection consider what it means to take a contrasting approach and to address the relationship between learning and writing in mainstream curriculum delivery.

The particular perspective adopted by this volume, which sees writing as a contextualized social practice, is a powerful tool for understanding the experience of students and teaching staff, and for locating that experience in the wider context of higher education at the present time. For example, it enables researchers to take into account a number of important changes in the policy and practice of higher education institutions in recent years, such as:

- the expansion of student numbers in higher education institutions;
- opening up of new routes into university study;
- the growth of vocational/technical programmes, including access courses for students from non-traditional backgrounds;
- the increasing frequently and cultural heterogeneity of students, in part due to the above two factors;
- the move away from curriculum delivery within clearly defined academic disciplines to interdisciplinary courses;
- the diversification of assessment methods, incorporating a wider range of written genres.

The social practice perspective underpinning the studies in this volume enables researchers in these fundamental contextual factors as the heart of research into student writing, whereas the ‘skills-based’ perspective would view them as background (at best) and irrelevant (at worst).

By adopting a social practice and contextual perspective the contributors are able to approach their research in the area from a starting point characterized by a number of theoretically-driven premises. For example:

- the changing context in higher education forms an integral feature of writing and assessment practices, rather than more background;
- to understand what ‘counts’ as ‘good writing’ in higher education requires an understanding of the culture of individual academic disciplines - their
An overview of the chapters in this collection

The chapters we have commissioned for this volume represent the rich diversity of approaches to social policy inquiry. They address a range of important issues and perspectives that are central to understanding and addressing the complex challenges of social policy today. By drawing on the work of leading experts in the field, we hope to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date summary of the state of research in social policy.

The chapters in this volume are organized around several key themes, including:

- **Inequality and Social Justice**: Chapters focus on the structural and institutional dimensions of inequality and how these are shaped by social policy. They examine the impact of policy on social stratification, the distribution of resources, and the well-being of different social groups.

- **Health and Well-being**: The chapters in this section explore the role of social policy in promoting health and well-being. They discuss the policy implications of emerging trends in public health, aging, and mental health.

- **Melting Pot of Social Policy**: This section features contributions that explore the intersection of social policy with other disciplines, such as law, economics, and sociology. They highlight the need for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and addressing social policy issues.

- **Social Policy in an Era of Crisis**: Chapters in this section focus on the challenges and opportunities presented by the current political and economic climate. They examine the role of social policy in responding to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic fallout from the crisis.

- **Conclusion**: The concluding chapter provides a synthesis of the key themes and arguments presented in the book, offering a broader perspective on the field of social policy.

Throughout the volume, we have sought to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of research in social policy by bringing together contributions from leading scholars in the field. We hope that this volume will be a valuable resource for students, researchers, and policymakers interested in advancing our understanding of social policy and its impact on society.
Writing and vocationally oriented study in universities: Are the 'old' genres up to the job?

Universities have been involved in the training and updating of professionals for a very long time. Indeed it has sometimes been said, only partly seriously, that universities have successfully positioned themselves as providers of training for virtually every professional group except (until recently) the university teachers. There are nevertheless important changes taking place in the contexts within which such training is carried out. The growing emphasis upon lifelong learning (i.e., the idea that learning has resulted in a wider range of courses, not just for students in higher education but for the whole workforce. The study of dance is not, strictly speaking, professional training as such. Nevertheless, ballet and choreographers offer some interesting discussions in Chapter 3 of the tensions between practical (creative) work in the university and the relentless downward pressure to conform to conventional models of academic writing. In this sense, the analysis helps to illuminate the broader debates about academic writing. The fact that we have seen these limitations to be understood and confronted, and what counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and of course the whole of internal and external conflict, as reflected in the politics of the discipline.

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process. Why, then, should we conceptualize the work of student writers as being any different? In her study of mature adult students, Ivanic (1998) further explores the importance of the self by making distinctions between the 'an autobiographical self', the 'disclosed self' and the 'self as author'.

In Chapter 6, Pheilss Gross examines the nature of the 'personal' in student writing, and suggests that in their journal writing students were able to present a strong authorial voice in ways they did not feel able to do in more conventional essay-type assignments. She explores the conflicts inherent for students in writing in a subject area such as anthropology — which encourages reflection on the one hand, and yet recognizes the 'problematic' nature of personal knowledge in student writing on the other.

Mary Scott's chapter (5) is concerned with the sense of agency of student writers following a postgraduate certificate in education course. She suggests that there is an inherent problematic in the close correspondence which is often assumed by examiners between students' writing and their own identities as creative and active practitioners. She suggests that it is more valuable to see students' written work as examples of discourses shaped by social conventions — as displays of 'performance' rather than as 'competence'. As the joins it, steering between the Scylla and Charybdis of 'performance' and 'competence' is no easy task. Whereas 'competence' may be associated with a student teacher's in-built creativity and therefore implies writing cannot be taught, 'performance' may suggest that writing can be reduced to 'rules of realization' or 'transferable skills'. For Scott, neither encapsulates the real tensions that are present for students in their negotiations with the writer's sense of self in the contrasting worlds of the university and the school.

In Chapter 3, Rex Baud, Remy Clark and Rachel Rimmershine concentrate upon the possible messages that are conveyed to students by the different kinds of tutor feedback that they receive on their work. From the students' perspective, these are concerned with messages about themselves, about the function of academic writing; about the values and beliefs underpinning institutions. All these messages may create contradictions for students in terms of their own identity. Students inevitably read feedback from their tutors in terms of evaluation of themselves, if they receive feedback indicating that their work is inadequate, this early becomes translated into feelings of personal inadequacy. Discouraging feedback, therefore, affects students' self-esteem.

Mary Lea takes a rather different approach to the nature of identity when she explores in Chapter 8 the positions that students and tutors take up in their contributions to computer conferences. She uses the linguistic concept of modality to examine the ways in which students and tutors make commitments to their views of academic knowledge and how they use the written texts of the conference to position themselves in relation to the academic context of the course. She suggests that in an undergraduate philosophy course, tutors and students take up more traditional roles, whereas in the new environment of the MA course in the 'Applications of information technology in open and distance education' tutors act more in the role of facilitators, with students assuming more control over their interpretation of what counts as valid academic knowledge.

Lea and Street see issues of identity and personal knowledge as central to their model of academic literacy which recognizes the value of the beliefs and assumptions about writing and knowledge that students bring to the academy. As both Sierer and McMillan illustrate in their chapters, this is of particular importance in relation to adult learners and no more so than for established professionals. Sierer considers the kinds of problems posed for professional teachers who can find themselves positioned as outsiders by the university. This positioning conflicts with both the professional experience that they bring with them to their studies and with their professional purposes for studying. Sierer explores how the writing requirements of their course position them not as developing professionals but as novice academics.

Dance students may feel comfortable with their own creative practices. However, as Mitchell and her colleagues explore in Chapter 5, tensions and conflicts arise when students are required to write within the context of their course. The authors draw here on Hall's model of personal identity formation in offering a socially orientated explanation for the choreographer and the writing tasks. One of the ideas that they explore is how in choreography the student has to 'make a case for her dance as a successful realization of a dance idea', with clear connections with the writing process. On reading the chapters in this volume we are left with a strong impression that student academic writing is concerned with much more than the reproduction, or even the representation, of ideas. The whole process of writing involves making meaning in a very specific academic context, both the new and the old. The authors point to instances where knowledge, and therefore inevitable meaning, is contested by both staff and students. They explore what such contestation can mean for student writers and the different ways in which issues of identity are played out in the writing process. The contributions to this volume illustrate repeatedly that in their writing academic knowledge is not merely taken up by students and summarized back to their tutors through the process of assessment. Instead, students in both new and old disciplinary areas are finding ways in which they can use their writing as a vehicle for the exploration of what counts as knowledge in the new contexts of today's higher education.
Part 1
Student Writing: Practices and Contexts

1
Academic Writing in New and Emergent Discipline Areas

Mike Baynham

Introduction

The student who is asked to write like a sociologist must find a way to insert himself into a discourse defined by the complex and diffuse conceptions of objects, methods, rules definitions, techniques and tools. In addition he must be in control of specific field conventions, a set of rules and methods which marks the discourse as asigning to a certain discipline. These vary even within disciplines: a reader response critic will emphasise one set of textual elements, a literary historian another, and the essays produced will contain these differences. (Ball et al. 1990:357)

So why the poor nursing student, who is required to write at times like a sociologist, at others like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner? Much of the literature on disciplinary genres even when it is discussing phenomena of heterogeneity, blurring and crossing (see Brin 1993), the incarnations of traditional disciplines. In a set of interviews conducted at the University of Technology, Sydney (Bernham et al. 1995; Lee et al. 1995; Geehan et al. 1996; Lee 1997) we were particularly interested in discipline areas where complex combinations of disciplinary influences intersect, in the 'new' discipline areas of the 'new' university.

A basic assumption is that, in order to understand the problematic of the novice writer, we need to understand the disciplinary contexts within which they are required to write, or more specifically the disciplines they are writing themselves into. But I would also like you to keep in your mind's eye the image of the burned freshman nursing student, hurrying from lecture to tutorial, backpack full of photocopy journal articles, notes and guidelines for an essay on the sociology of nursing, a clinical report, a case study, a reflective journal. They are certainly living disciplinary and textual heterogeneity.
Recent advances in the understanding of disciplines and disciplinariness (see Messer-Davidow et al. 1995) emphasize that, rather than being homogeneous content domains, academic disciplines are radic-
ally heterogeneous and constituted in difference. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the treatment of "practice-based" disciplines of the sort, say, those of art or law. Academic disciplinariness and difference have significant im-
lications for student academic writers who can be understood as writing themselves into a "disciplinary position," by which I mean the internal tensions and conflicts over issues such as what counts as knowledge, what should be where in the curriculum and how it should be valued, where boundaries within and between disciplines should be drawn. Students are learning to take up writing positions in the context of this diversity and its accompanying tensions. In this chapter I will explore the implications of this approach in the areas of nursing education and adult education, drawing out implications for both research and pedagogy in academic literacies.

I will begin by identifying three perspectives on the theorisation of academic writing. The first, a "skill-based" approach to the teaching of acad-
emic writing, assumes that there is a generic set of skills and strategies that could be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. The second, "disciplined," literacies approach assumes a relative homogeneity of discipline, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. The third, "practice-based," approach proposes here investigates student writing as both text and practice, arguing that, most crucially, the student writer is learning to take up disciplinary positions in a discourse "community." Where the disciplinary positions are conflicting, overlapping or indeed blurred, the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics that are produced. Lea and Street (Chapter 2) also explore a tripartite ap-
proach to student writing drawn from their research on academic literacies in UK university settings.

This chapter will be illustrated with data from a series of related studies which investigated the discipline-specific aspects of student writing in new and emergent disciplines, focusing in particular on the ways in which the disciplinary practices are crucial to an understanding of student writing (understood as both product and process) and the ways in which student learning and ways of writing positions in text. A concept like 'writing position' cannot be fully or richly understood without a detailed and specific understanding of what counts as knowledge and what counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the aware-
ness of internal diversity and conflict, as realised in the politics of the discipline.

So where does this leave the student writer? In the concluding section of this book in Chapter 7, I suggest that the student writing pedagogy must make the student writer conscious of the "disciplined" ways in which concerns of disciplinariness, disciplinarianism and consequent writing positions influence - in other words, as Griffin (quoted in Klein 1995) suggests, we must 'teach the coalface'.

Academic writing, disciplinariness and difference

So far I have suggested the need to move away from a generic, skill-based approach to understanding academic writing in two directions, first in mak-
ing use of the resources of linguistic analysis to capture the specific features of the language used in different disciplines, and second in problematising the social practices of the discipline itself. Ball et al. (1991: 342), quoted at the beginning of this chapter, focused on the diversity within disciplines as well as across them, that is, the points that are picked up and expanded by Gorgias (1995: 12):

What complicates research and pedagogy in writing in the disciplines is the epistemological and language diversity that in fact exists across disciplines, but also within disciplines. As Kenneth Runcie (1987: 333) has argued, there is a "disciplinary assumption of generality, commonisation, abstraction, closure of disciplines, the situation is actually more complicated. There is diversity within disciplines as different types of professionals exist side by side in the same writing." Runcie’s argument is supported by Scott and Knibbs’ (1995) study of the inquiry processes of members from social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. Their study shows that the process of academic inquiry is dynamic, shifting along personal and disciplinary lines, with individual scholars and researchers often crossing disciplinary boundaries to pursue their research questions (cf. Kline 1995). These kinds of lateral moves across fields account in part for the growing diversity within fields.

So student writers are writing themselves into this diversity, not into the convenient fiction of a homogenous history, geography or sociology.

New and emerging disciplinary areas

The authors reviewed so far have been concentrating on the disciplinary diversity of traditional university disciplines. In this chapter, however, I will be presenting case studies of student writing practices in new and emerging areas, where the focus is not on the diversity within disciplines as well as across them, but rather on the formation of professions, nurses, adult educators, engineers, what might be called "practitioner-oriented" disciplines.

Text and emerging areas typically draw on a range of disciplines. Let us take adult education as an example. The adult education theorist Goffman (1963: 15) identifies a range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, geography, philosophy and economics, which impact on adult edu-
cation as a field of study. Knowledge from these disciplines is, of course, not

Three perspectives on academic writing

The skill-based approach to teaching of academic writing underscores the traditional "study skills" approach to teaching academic writing and assumes that there is a generic set of skills and strategies that can be "transferred" or "referenced" that can be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. Using a skill-based approach, students are typically provided with prescriptive courses or ongoing support sessions in study methods, often in mixed disciplinary groups, with the implication that they can take the skills they learn and apply them in their particular disciplinary context. A major criticism of this approach is that it tends to ignore the discipline-specificity of writing requirements.

The "disciplined" approach draws on the resources of linguistic analysis, in particular recent (see Halliday and Martin 1993) and genre studies (Swales 1990, Freedman and Mckay 1994), to understand the discipline-specific nature of writing tasks. Register analysis can characterise the language of his-
tory or science, while genre analysis focuses on the text types that are required - for example, the history essay, the laboratory report, the case report. There is now plenty of evidence of the language demands of particular discipline areas which can be used to design discipline-specific curricula to support academic writing. One problem with this text-based approach, however, is that it often assumes a relatively homogeneous discipline, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. To talk glibly about "the language of science or history" can gloss over significant differences within disciplines which, as we shall see, are increasingly marked by differences of disciplinarity and disciplinariness themselves.

The "practice-based" approach emphasises the social and discursive prac-
tices through which a discipline constructs itself. A lot of the pioneer work in this regard has been carried out in the study of scientific communities (Lave 1980, Bawarier 1988, Mertens 1996). Such studies look at how science is constituted and maintained, how norms are socialised into the practices which are constitutive of the field. Messer-Davidow et al. (1995) present a collection of such studies across a broad range of discipline areas, including accounting, social sciences, economics, law, nursing and medicine. From a practice perspective, we are interested in how students as normative members are brought into the typical discursive practices of the discipline, and how this might be literary criticism, ethnographic fieldwork or participating in laboratory experiments.

The emphasis is on the ways in which discipline are con-
stituted it, however, important not to lose touch with the deeply focused specificities which text-based studies provide. Language is, after all, a major means (if not necessarily the only means) by which disciplinary knowl-
dge is constructed, reproduced, contested and added to, and learned. We need precise linguistic accounts of the linguistic means that are deployed in specific disciplinary contexts, but we also need to return to explain the complexity and specificity of these contexts. So combining both the

Academic Writing in New Disciplinary Areas

imported raw but is "recontextualized," in Bertrand's (1990) sense. Within adult education as a field of study there are different schools of thought, with different versions of what counts as knowledge, or even the bound-
aries of the field (Folin 1995: 14). These involve major epistemological cleavages, for example, around positivist, interpretive and post-positivist accounts of knowledge and action. All of this adds up to the disciplinary terrain on to which the student adult educator is introduced. To para-
phrase Hall et al., when the adult education student is asked to "write like an adult educator" this will be the terrain he/she will learn to inhabit. By mapping out the major dimensions of this terrain, we can develop an account of the "disciplinary politics" (as the student writer is setting him/herself into. To illustrate this, I would like to consider nursing education as a case study.

The data I will present below were taken from a study of the acade-
mic writing practices in three discipline areas - nursing, information science and women’s studies - at the University of Technology, Sydney, a new Australian university (in the sense that it was formed in the 1989 restructuring of higher education in Australia) whose mission statement identifies it as providing education for the professions. The data collected included interviews with students and lecturers, observation in the courses and examples of student writing. Below, first-year nursing students and their instructors talk about writing and the disciplinary issues of nursing. I will also discuss issues arising in a first-year entrepreneurship task for a subject "Professional Responsibilities in Nursing" which focuses on the chang-
ing social roles of the nursing profession.

Nursing education: a case study

One of the significant issues in nursing education has been the shift, over the late decade or so, from a "practice-oriented" to a "professionalisation" con-
eceptions of nursing (see Gray and Prat 1989: 195). This has coincided with the shift of nursing training/education out of the hospitals and into the universities. No one aspect of the disciplinary politics of nursing is more pronounced in this shift from practice-oriented to professionalised conceptions of nursing. Another union which is central to nursing education is that between prac-
tical knowledge and theorised knowledge. Like adult education, nursing draws on a heterogeneous disciplinary base, most strikingly in the contrast between the science-based, clinical subjects and the ethical subjects. Under-
lying these subjects are very different conceptions of what counts as knowledge, the clinical subjects being underpinned by the positivist scientific paradigm, the ethical subjects by an interpretive or post-modern perspect-
ive on what counts as knowledge. The shift into academic training/training/education produces in turn processes of disciplinisation, where nursing is presented to constitute itself as a discipline (which there are interesting parallels with adult education as a field of study.) As Webb (1992: 287) suggests.

19 Mike Baynham
Mike Baysom

Academic Writing in New Disciplinary Areas

Table 1.1: The disciplinary politics of nursing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice-based</th>
<th>Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical knowledge</td>
<td>Theorized knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homogeneous disciplinary base</td>
<td>Heterogeneous disciplinary base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical subjects (positive)</td>
<td>Ethical subjects (interpretative/critical)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nursing is a relatively young academic discipline. Like other disciplines which have attempted to establish respect and credibility, such as sociology and psychology, nursing has sought to do this byimitating longer-established disciplines and in particular the traditional or physical sciences. Underpinning all of this is what might be termed the 'gender politics' of nursing, the construction of nurses as a feminized profession in relation to its other, the medical profession. This disciplinary politics of nursing (see Table 1.1) constitutes the context into which nursing students are writing themselves.

In the following extracts, nursing lecturers and a nursing student discuss some of these issues:

There is a big gap between those teaching in theoretical areas and those in practical areas which is nowhere near being bridged and it will take a long time before it's bridged. This puts students in an interesting position. It is probably less problematic now but it's 5-10 years ago when out students went to practice after graduation they were treated very badly because they were seen to be trained in an institution that was inappropriate for training nurses, by people who were too distant from nursing and in areas that were irrelevant to nursing. Now because there is an increasing number of university-trained nurses practicing, that has started to change, but the problem remains.

(Lecturer interview)

I think those tensions reflect the tension for nursing because the universe seems to be teaching people about all these 'everyday' things and out in the real world they're saying they can't even fill a catheter but that's not true. What we do teach them is about real nursing but it's more than that, and I think that the faculty has to understand.

(Lecturer interview)

So how do students experience the disciplinary tensions between nursing as a science-based curriculum and its ethical, humanistic dimension? The following student expresses her surprise about the range of what counted as an appropriate topic in nursing journals:

When I started to look for articles, I found there were more than I thought. I thought that, being in the nursing field, journals would focus on hypertension, neck problems, new drugs, etc. But I was surprised they have a lot of articles based on hazards happening in the work place, nurses' perceptions of their work, nurses' careers about dealing with AIDS patients, things like autonomy, authority, where does your responsibility stop and what are the boundaries. It was good.

(Student interview)

The same student identifies confusing differences between the kinds of writing that are expected of her in different parts of the program:

But for medical, surgical, if you have to write about care for a person with AIDS, you either have to know or you don't know. This semester we had a case on cardiac failure and that was another one where you have to go and read how the heart works, how it pumps, where does it go wrong and why does the patient present with such and such and you have to learn. I did learn from that assignment. But for this assignment, I felt that for me it was good because I spent time thinking about it, I didn't do much reading, I didn't learn very much but here some things didn't catch my attention, especially the need for nurses to prove that we are people with nurses, we're not just handsmaids, which I always felt, I felt that it was never being argued enough about but I now know that's not true, but it hasn't really made me a better nurse.

(Student interview)

In the following extract, the student articulates something of the underlying politics of the nursing and medical professions:

So for university back home in Singapore we were taught what were your responsibilities, what are you accountable for, what are you accountable to, but we were never taught why nurses need autonomy, why you should feel like you have a decision to make about your patients' well-being. We always were with the doctors, of course you have your differences with the doctors and you get doctors who work with you and you get doctors who think they are doctors and you're just a nurse. But it [autonomy] has never been a main issue.

(Student interview)

In this section, I have tried to sketch some of the broad parameters and tensions within which nursing students are writing. My argument is that the people in the practice area have legitimate concerns which must be addressed by us, and I think the practice must address the fact that nursing has got to develop a profession. The only way you can develop a profession is developing thinking people. That's the tension for nursing.

(Lecturer interview)

The same lecturer identifies the disciplinary clearances between the positive scientific perspective and the myth, while arguing for their interrelatedness in the nurse education curriculum:

I'm not so sure that nursing is so well established as an academic discipline that it is fact has traditions. Apart from - I suppose there is a clear division between those that approach it from a scientific point of view and those who approach it from humanities. I don't know that they are in any way competitive, or at least theoretically they are not competitive.

Interviewer: They deal with different aspects.

Yes, exactly. Some people might want to argue that they are distinct and self-contained approaches to understanding nursing and you can stand alone. I don't think that's the case. I think that's a mistaken view. My academic work has been in that area of nursing where it's seen to be primarily a human science discipline rather than a physical science discipline.

Within that, I suppose I would say the divisions are not so clear, though I would certainly have some sympathy with those views that derive from the non-positivist epistemology, post-structuralist thinking. Although I'm not always in agreement with them because I am applied to nursing, but my background would be more akin to those approaches.

Another lecturer speaks more generally of the tension between the scientific and humanities-based components of the curriculum:

The major tension I would have to face is that I started in the K programme which was very much a humanities programme and we did things like important skills to develop a student's thinking, their critical thinking skills, with much less emphasis on how to study - the research. When I came over to this campus there was very much a focus on the nursing things, the science and the nursing, and there was even less emphasis about ethics and law and critical thinking and the humanities, the meaning of caring, the meaning of being a person. So the assignments that I had to mark were really bad. I think the first I couldn't believe that these people were in the third year of their programme and they cannot write, they cannot think, they cannot critically evaluate other people's work. So that was a real dilemma for me and I think that was the tension for the faculty, we had this terrible background between one group of people feeling that one campus wasn't teaching how to nurse and the other...
Here are some examples of the two contrasting ways in which the student writers understand the authors' arguments in their essays. The first is an authorization based on the perspective of what the students typically do:

Lack of sufficient autonomy and authority is even when a nurse has to have a physician as a authority when the nurse suspects the patient has a urinary tract infection. Some physicians who trust experienced staff will leave blank signed forms for nurses to fill out if they see the need arising. (R. White, Registered Nurse, personal communication, 6 October 1994). In this instance the nurse needs more autonomy and authority so they can fill in a form and send a sample to the laboratory thereby saving precious time and also initiating treatment quicker which will eventually benefit the patient. When nurses see that a patient is being sufficiently heard and has no further need of an intravenous drip, they have to inform the doctor who will then authorize the removal of the catheter. Nurses are sufficiently educated to make these judgements but due to lack of autonomy and authority are unable to do so.

(Kirsten)

Kirsten's statements about nurses' need for autonomy and authority, in which autonomy and decision-making on the part of nurses are shown to be improving care for the patient, are authorized by examples from her own experience. However, not from her experience, but from reading packaged literature which is significantly reinforced when the writer uses the 'personal communication' referencing convention to authorize a particular statement, based on experience from the field rather than from an academic source. Immediately following this, Kirsten authors a statement by sourcing it to an academic reference.

According to Kerenet (1988) nurses have been making independent decisions regarding management of their patients without wanting to accept accountability for these decisions. So Kirsten's essay uses a mix of these two strategies, which seems to be successful, as her essay is well received. Her comments are interesting, however. While giving the essay a better than average B grade, the comment is:

The weakness in your argument lies in a lack of support for claims . . .

In contrast to Kirsten's essay, this essay draws on both the author's experience and the academic sourcing strategy, other essays, such as Sue'S (grader b) and Lorraine'S (grader B+) rely almost exclusively on the academic sourcing strategy. Very rarely every statement they make can be traced back to an academic source.

Ironically, Beaumont (1987) states that some nurses themselves are reluctant to receive responsibility and accountability for their actions, as they are 'low risk takers' and fear mistakes. However, a study done by Kramer and Schelenberg (1988, cited in Collins and Henderson 1991: 25), claims that nurses preferred to work in an environment which encouraged autonomous practice. Furthermore, Schoen (1992) confirmed their claims and contended that a number of research findings including her own, have discovered a positive link between autonomy and job satisfaction.

(Sue)

In Sue's essay, what nurses say/think/feel/do is constructed purely through the filter of the research literature. Nurses are present in the text only as reconstituted or recontextualized into a body of research. So how do these authorisation strategies operate in the less successful essays? We will look at Debrose's essay (graded C) and Karen's essay (graded C-).

In the health care system the doctors have the most autonomy and authority this male-dominated profession use the path to professionalism to ensure themselves of financial security and autonomy (Short and Sherman 1987; 1991). Nurses believe that if they follow this same path to professionalism they too will have an increase in financial rewards, autonomy and authority as seen by others who have already benefited from their standing as a profession. This push for nurses to become professionals puts a great strain on the so-called doctor-nurse relationship, the college of surgeons assumed that the medical practitioner was the natural leader of the health care team and that there should be a revival of trust and loyalty on the part of nurses (Palmer and Short 1993: 155). The doctor still dominates the health care system and sees that through nurses pushing for professionalism that they are no longer seen as a loyal part of the health care team. Nurses believe that this is not true and that doctors should be educated to have a greater appreciation of nursing theory and practice, that decision making processes should be reviewed and that changes that should take place in hospital administration could ease tension between nurses and doctors.

(Karen)

In Karen's essay we find examples both of the academic sourcing strategy, with quoted statements attributed to sources, and the unattributed appeal to experience.

Nurses believe that this is not true and that doctors should be educated to have a greater appreciation of nursing theory and practice, that decision making processes should be reviewed and that changes that should take place in hospital administration could ease tension between nurses and doctors. The arguments are voiced, not from the research literature, but through the mouths of generalized doctors and nurses. Take the following statement, from a later stage of Karen's essay:

Academic Writing in New Disciplinary Areas

Nurse have very little authority in their profession even though they have a close relationship with the patient they have very little authority over them. It is the doctor who always has the final say on patient treatment. Karen's essay seems to dramatise an argument between real life doctors and nurses who do what, what are the boundaries and division of responsibility for health care.

Debrose's essay, according to the subject outline, 'agrees a performance which reflects little understanding, or gives little evidence of a serious attempt to meet the expectations of the assignment task.' Her essay starts with the following:

Nursing is a learned profession and no one can, on their own, achieve the level of knowledge, skill and expertise that nurses must possess in order to provide quality care. Nursing is a learned profession and no one can, on their own, achieve the level of knowledge, skill and expertise that nurses must possess in order to provide quality care.

The marker's comments are as follows:

The main argument should be developed with clear evidence and examples to illustrate the points you make. The essay could provide more depth and detail and the conclusions could be more specific.

(Lee)

Debrose's apparent adoption of the impersonalized, unattributed academic voice is disadvantageous because the reader/marker can in fact time it back to an attributable source that is rather close at hand, the subject outline.

Lack of autonomy and accountability are also critical concerns in this essay. Debrose shifts further into the personalized experiential voice by stating it to the reader, e.g.,

So even though nurses must talk to the patient, they display professional comportment through their responses, professionalism, using our knowledge to choose what care will give them the best benefits, while providing emotional care.

On the other hand, although almost all the students in the course were aware of the importance of autonomy and accountability, the organization would eventually collapse. If we had too much autonomy, the profession would experience problems as such as lack of agreement between nurses, administrators, and patients. Ansel and others (1981 and Simpson 1991) have raised the issue of such professional choices as resistance to the impersonalizing academic conventions. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore why this writer made these choices, but it is clear that the shift into 'we' is a significant shift into an all-powerful voice. The essay is largely written as if we were the only one responsible for the argument. As writers we can consciously take risks, use strategies which float dominant conventions based on informed choice. We can also produce dialogical, conversational texts. But this is based on awareness of the options. A writer who has not been made aware of the options is not positioned to make an informed choice.

Debrose's appropriation of wording which are bound to spring to the attention of the readers/markers who probably write them is perhaps as they are 'low risk takers' and fear mistakes. However, a study done by Kramer and Schelenberg (1988, cited in Collins and Henderson 1991: 25), claims that nurses preferred to work in an environment which encouraged autonomous practice. Furthermore, Schoen (1992) confirmed their claims and contended that a number of research findings, including her own, have discovered a positive link between autonomy and job satisfaction.

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The marker's comments are as follows:

You have quoted this word for word from the subject outline without acknowledging your sources.

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Debrose's appropriation of wording which are bound to spring to the attention of the readers/markers who probably write them is perhaps
to back up or elaborate an argumentative position that he has already introduced. The strategy is therefore quite different from that of Sise or Lorrain in which the text is constructed almost entirely from sourced material.

'Teach the conflicts'

In this chapter I have somewhat complicated the picture of student academic writing practices within new and emergent discipline areas along the lines suggested by Goggin (1993). The skills-based approach to the teaching of academic writing assumes that there was a generic set of skills and strategies that can be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. The text-based approach assumes a relatively homogeneous discipline, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. I am suggesting, in line with writers such as Ball et al. (1998) that, most crucially, the student writer is learning to take up disciplinary positions in discourse and that this needs to be taught explicitly.

If students are to see themselves as something other than 'inspired' or 'shooting the bull' or 'passing' – representations of disciplinary authenticity which posit them as essentially passive in relation to the work in hand – we must begin to make visible and available the machinery which produces the university's disciplines and its multiple discourses.

(Ball et al. 1998: 157)

Where the disciplinary positions are confounded, overlapping or indeed blurred (see Goetz 1975, cited in Klein 1993) the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics that is produced. So where does this leave the student writer? In this section I argue that academic writing pedagogy must make the concerns of disciplinarity, disciplinatisation and consequent writing positions central – in other words, as Graff (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we must 'teach the conflicts'.

As I suggested earlier in the nurse education case study, a major conflict is between, on the one hand, the practice-oriented account of nursing and the experiential ways of knowing that it makes authoritative and, on the other hand, the professionalised, disciplinarily orientated account of nursing, with its consequent impersonalisation and generalisation of the nursing subject. We have seen how these conflicts work within the texts examined earlier, producing at one moment highly valued, if dodgy, texts in the impersonalised disciplinary voice (Sue and Lorrain's); Other similarly valued essays (Kerren and Mark's) draw on the strategy of authorization from experience, though running the risk of the critical marker's comment. The less successful essays (Karen and Deborah's) appear to fail both in making authoritative statements in the impersonalised disciplinary voice and in the generalised experiential voice of 'what nurses think'. Mark's essay seems to theme out of a real problem in the experimental-practice-based account and the impersonalised disciplined account of nursing. While appearing somewhat unconventional, i.e. not dodgy, in terms of the conventions of academic writing, it is highly valued by the marker.

It is worth noting that the tensions and conflicts between the experiential/practice-based voice and the impersonalised disciplinary voice and the consequent availability of writing positions are a major theme of the work of Hunt and others (see Hunt and Simpson 1995) in critical language awareness approaches to the teaching and learning of academic writing, as they are in Ball et al. (1998) and, indeed, are taken up by other writers in this volume (see Steene, Chapter 11). Here they map very specifically on to the shift of nursing into the academy with its consequent professionalisation and disciplinatisation. This would suggest that the disciplinary politics of nursing is not in itself limited to nursing alone, in that it draws on issues that are clearly broader than nursing such as the positivist/critical hermeneutic discourses as well as theory/practice divides.

What every student needs to know about academic writing is precisely the ways in which taking up or rejecting writing positions involves taking up or rejecting disciplinary positions. This is not a pedagogy to be offered instead of a focus on the technical aspects of academic writing (of course someone needs to talk before through the social meaning of plagiarism, to give her the skills to quote and reference effectively). It provides a complement to the course in which the student academic writer can explore the writing/disciplinary/subject positions that are available along with the areas of blurring, overlap and conflict that create difficulties and choices in taking up an authoritative position in writing.

Conclusion: intrinsic and embodied readings

An underlying theme of this chapter has been, in a sense, how lecturers/markers read student writing and how students read the circumstances within which they are required to write. Here I take 'reading' in a broader pedagogical sense: how we read these texts as people concerned with the teaching of academic writing. I want to suggest that there are two broad ways of characterising this: first, the idea of intrinsic reading or an intrinsic reading, second, the idea of embodied reading and embodied readings. What do I mean by this?

An intrinsic reading is one which reads the pedagogical issues of student texts in terms of skills or technologies. Learner writers in this version will have greater and lesser degrees of skill in, for example, incorporating wordings and meanings into text. They will be at greater or lesser extent have available to them the linguistic technologies to do so. An embodied reading is one that reads the text as an embodiment of the disciplinary politics within which it is produced, and as an embodiment of the processes of subject production at work in learner writers engage with the writing demands of the discipline. In this chapter I argue that such embodied readings are an essential basis for academic writing pedagogy.
Student Writing and Staff Feedback in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach

Mary R. Lea and Brian V. Street

Introduction

The opinion is often expressed that standards of student 'literacy' are falling, whether at school or in higher education; many academic staff claim that students can no longer write. 'Back to basics' ideas are now fast taking hold in today's higher education. Recently, we received an award from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council to conduct a research project entitled Perspectives on Academic Literacies: An Institutional Approach that attempted to look at these issues in more depth. The research looked at perceptions and practices of student writing in higher education, taking as case studies one new and one traditional university in southeast England. Against the background of numerous changes in higher education in the UK and increasing numbers of non-traditional entrants, this research has been concerned with a sober institutional approach to student writing, rather than a call for locating 'problems' with individual students. One of the main purposes of the research has been to move away from a skills-based, deficit model of student writing and to consider the complex of writing practices that are taking place at degree level in universities. As a starting point, this research adopts the concept of academic literacies as a framework for understanding university writing practices.

Academic literacies

Learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. Academic literacy practices—reading and writing within disciplines—constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. A practices approach to literacy takes account of the cultural and contextual component of writing and reading practices, and this in turn has important implications for our understanding of issues of student learning. Educational research into student learning in higher education has tended to concentrate on ways in which students can be helped to adapt their practices to those of the university (Gibbs 1994); from this perspective, the codes and conventions of academic life can be taken as given to students, our research is founded on the premise that in order to understand the nature of academic learning, it is important to investigate the understandings of both academic staff and students about their own literacy practices without making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective. This is particularly important in trying to develop a more complex analysis of what it means to become academically literate. We believe that it is important to realize that meanings are contested among the different parties involved: institutions, staff and students. Viewing literacy from a cultural and social practice approach, rather than in terms of educational judgements about good and bad writing, and approaching meanings as contested can give us insights into the nature of academic literacy in particular and academic learning in general through researching these differing expectations and interpretations of university writing we hope to throw light on failure or success, as well as success.

The notion of academic literacies has been developed from the area of "new literacies" (Barlow 1994; Hartman 1996; Street 1991, 1994) to draw out the implications of this approach for our understanding of issues of student learning. We have argued elsewhere (Lea and Street 1995) that educational research into student writing in higher education has fallen into three major paradigms: or models: study skills, academic socialization; and academic literacies (see Figure 2.1). The models are not mutually exclusive, and we would not want to new them in a simple linear time dimension, whereby one model supersedes the other and is passed on to another. Rather, we would like to think that each model successively encapsulates those above it, so that the academic socialization perspective generated study skills but includes them in the broader context of the acculturation processes we describe below, and likewise the academic literacies approach incorporates the academic socialization model, building on insights developed there as well as the study skills view. The academic literacies model, therefore, incorporates both of the other models into a more encompassing understanding of the nature of student writing within institutional practices, power relations and identities, as we explain below. We take a hierarchical view of the relationship between the three models, privileging the 'academic literacies' approach. We believe that in teaching as well as in research, focusing on specific skills issues around student writing, such as how to open or close an essay or whether to use the first person, takes on an entirely different meaning if the context is solely that of study skills, if the process is seen as part of academic socialization, or if it is viewed more broadly as an aspect of the whole institutional and epistemological context. We explicate each model...
The research

During 1995-96 we carried out research at two universities, one new and one traditional, in south-east England. Ten interviews were conducted with staff who had a significant and long experience of supporting academic writers, either individually or in small groups. At the new university, 15 members of academic staff and 20 students were interviewed in the same way. The interviews at both institutions included the direction of quality assurance units and "learning support" staff.

Our initial research objectives was to explore the contribution of ethnographic research to educational development in higher education. The short length of the project limited the full in-depth ethnographic approach which such research could warrant. However, we did adopt an "ethnographic-style" approach (Green and Boorman 1997) to the research which included conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff and students; participant observation of group sessions and attention to samples of students' writing, written feedback on students' work and handouts on 'everyday' writing. A major part of the research has included a linguistically based analysis of the textual material. As the research progressed we realized that this was an equally important source of data which we needed to benefit from our own situated knowledge of the institutional settings within which we were researching. Adapting an ethnographic style approach to the research, within settings of which we already had prior knowledge, enabled us to move away from the focus on transcribed interview material to a more eclectic approach, merging the importance of understanding both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations of university writing.

Our research, therefore, was not based on a representative sample from which generalizations or a view of staff behavior were drawn but rather was conceived as providing case studies that enabled us to explore theoretical issues and generate questions for further research in systematic study of the practice. The approach, therefore, was the ethnographic tradition described by Mitchell (1984). Rather than applying "empiricism by description" (as in much social science), our work is concerned with understanding what he terms "analytical induction".

What the anthropologist using a case study to support an argument does is to show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances. A good case study, therefore, enables the analyst to establish theoretical and ethical connections between events and phenomena which previously were inexactable.

(Mitchell 1984: 299)

In the present context, the issues and students whom we interviewed and the documents we collected can be taken as case studies of different perspectives on academic literacies. While not representing a sample from which generalizations can be drawn regarding the whole of English higher education, these case studies can point to important theoretical questions and connections that might otherwise be raised. The data, for instance, enable us to explore the hypothesis that, viewed as 'academic literacies', the beliefs and practices of tutors and students constitute a different kind of evidence than if the same data were viewed in terms of skills or academic socialization. These connections can, for instance, generate evidence for differences between staff and students' understanding of the writing process at levels of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge not only than at the level of technical skill, surface linguistic competence or cultural assimilation. We have therefore approached our research data in order to acquire insights and conceptual elaboration on our three models of student writing and to generate from them analytic induction rather than "enumerative induction".

The unstructured, in-depth interviews examined how students understood the different literacy practices which they experience in their studies and in what ways academic staff understood the literacy requirements of their own subject area and make these explicit to their students. We gave participants the opportunity to reflect upon the writing practices of the university, at different levels and in different courses. We encouraged them to consider what influences were being brought to bear upon them not only from practice, but from other aspects of life. We started to outline, as we saw them, the writing requirements of their own disciplines, the constraints placed on them by third parties and the processes they saw as central to their identity which generated, in turn, the writing practices of their students.

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(Mitchell 1984: 299)
Writing requirements: student interpretations

The research interviews with students revealed a number of different interpretations and understandings of what standardized, thought that they were meant to be doing in their writing. Students described taking "ways of knowing" (Roke et al., 1995) and of writing from one course into another, only to find that their attempt to present ideas was unsuccessful and left with negative feedback. Students were conscious of matching between diverse writing requirements and knew that their task was to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require. This was at a more complex level than others, such as the "essay" or "report," bring more deeply to writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting.

Relations around student writing: interpreting feedback

So far, we have attempted to outline some of the foundations in the research data, and correlating variation in the different interpretations and understandings of student writing encountered. These variations exist within and across courses, subjects and disciplines — and between students and academic tutors in many different contexts. They are contextualized both in the testing frame of the test the assignments, and the accompanying feedback — and in the social relations that exist around them — the relationships of power and authority between tutor and student — and they are related to the emergent literacies integral to text construction.

Central to our understanding of both the varieties of academic literacies practices which students engage in across the university and the relations which exist around text production is an examination of the ways in which written feedback is interpreted by the students.

As we have illustrated, the research has been concerned with a textual examination of tutor written feedback on student work — both on standard feedback sheets and in the margins of assignments — and with students’ interpretations of the meanings that they attach to this feedback both in general and in a specific piece of written work. This analysis has raised questions about the relationship between feedback and epistemological issues of knowledge construction. How is feedback being used to direct students to develop and write their academic knowledge in very specific ways within particular courses which are often not necessarily recognized as ‘common sense ways of knowing’? We have already illustrated a feedback genre within the use of descriptive categories such as ‘bracketed’ and ‘arguement’ may embed constraining conceptual understandings. As we have suggested, such terms tend, therefore, to be rather elastic, particularistic, and may be more usefully understand in their go-together role or at a more complex ideological level within an institutional hierarchy than the unproblematic generic requirements of student writing.

One useful way of examining the relationships around texts may, then, be to start by examining the feedback itself and to give it a meaning by examining some of the genres of students’ written work and the genres of text feedback on it. We may be able to make more sense of the complex ways in which student and instructors construct appropriate ways of knowing and reproduce appropriate forms of disciplinary and subject knowledge. There is a dynamic within the feedback genre, for instance, which works to both construct academic knowledge and maintain relationships of power and authority between novice student and experienced academic. Assumption about what constitutes valid knowledge may be inferred by analysing feedback, but frequently such assumptions remain implicit, as in the feedback on the essays analysed above.

The ways in which teachers or writers indicate their implicit commitment to the truth of what is being said — what linguists refer to as ‘modality’ — vary with types of text and social relations (see Lax, Chapter 6, for a further discussion of modality). Toner comments frequently follow the form of what we term ‘categorical modality’, using imperatives and acausal with little mitigation or qualification. The first page of the student’s student essay analysis below has the following comments: ‘Expect a critical attitude throughout’ or ‘Linkage?’ Too many unlinked facts here. Can’t see argument.’ This categorical modality is also expressed here and frequently in the essays we have seen by means of orthographic marks such as ‘?”’ or ‘( )’, indicating disagreement, doubt, criticism. The ‘?’ frequently indicates not a genuine question which tutor and student are engaged in explaining, but rather is used in a kind of expletive, or as a categorical assertion that the point is not ‘correct’. In the essay in question there were some unstructured question marks, many with this function, and its bracket signs (‘.) indicating links that should have been made, in the space of 35 pages. One
has only to imagine other kinds of modality that could be expressed in this context to recognize the conventional and categorical nature of the image: mitigated contrasts such as ‘you might like to consider’, ‘have you thought about’, ‘in my opinion’, ‘perhaps’, and open-ended questions such as ‘would this be interpreted differently’, ‘is there a link with other comments here? etc.; would evoke a different modality (more provisional or mitigated), create a different genre and evoke a different interpersonal relationship between student as writer and tutor as reader than that indicated by the comments we describe here. In these the tutor clearly and firmly takes authority, assuming the right to criticise directly and categorically on the basis of an assumed ‘correct’ view of what should have been written and how. Students, however, may have a different interpretation of feedback comments. The anthropology student in question could not make sense of the feedback comment ‘Meaning?’ on his test. For him both the meaning of what he was saying and the development of the argument in his own text were clear. Even where students indicate in interviews that they did not understand the comments, thinking it unfair or even disagreed with it, few if any challenge the tutor’s right to make such comments. It appears, then, that written feedback on students’ work is not merely an attempt at communication or at learning a ‘discipline’ or at socialisation into a community – although it clearly has elements of all of these – but is also embedded in relationships of authority as a marker of difference and a marker of boundaries.

Additionally, institutional procedures were implicated in the ways in which students were able to read, understand and make use of feedback on their work. In the new university, where a fully modular system was in operation, it was reported to us by both staff and students alike that in many instances students did not receive feedback on assessed written work until they had completed their studies for the module. Inevitably, students found that they were unable to benefit from receiving feedback in this manner since they generally found comments to be specific to a particular piece of work, or at the least to the module being studied, and they reported that such feedback frequently bore no relationship to their studies in the subsequent module. Academic staff reported that they were unable to make best use of standard feedback sheets because these were rendered by students after module completion.

The problem with the modular system is that every piece of work they [students] do is for assessment purposes; it is not until they are well into the second module that they get the results from the first.

Effectively there is no feedback.

Evidence such as this led us to suggest that we consider the analysis of writing in the university as an ‘institutional’ issue, not just a matter for particular participation. The institution within which tutors and students write defines the conventions and boundaries of their writing practices, through its procedures and regulations (definitions of plagiarism, requirements of modularity and assessment procedures etc.), whatever individual
tutors and students may believe themselves to be as writers, and whatever autonomy and distinctiveness their disciplines may assert.

Future directions

Our research, then, indicates the variety in both the writing practices that students engage with as part of their university courses and the complex nature of the feedback they receive from tutors. These writing practices and genres are not simply concerned with technical matters in which ‘appropriate’ skills are acquired and courses become members of an expert community, as in the first two models described above (see Figure 2.1). The third model, that of academic literacies, from which we are viewing these data, suggests a more complex and nuanced interpretation, in which the processes of student writing and tutor feedback are defined through implicit assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge within a particular context, and the relationships of authority that exist around the communication of these assumptions. The nature of this authority and the claims associated with it can be identified through both formal, linguistic features of the writing involved and in the social and institutional relationships associated with it.

During the course of the research we have identified three thematic categories originating from both students and staff as ways of looking at students’ writing. The first is focused on the student and suggests that students lack a set of basic skills that can be dealt with primarily in remedial study skills or learning support units. This takes no account of the interaction of the student with institutional practices and is based on the underlying principle that knowledge is transferred rather than mediated or constructed through writing practices. The second, identified most clearly by students, is derived from the interaction of student and tutor and is concerned with issues such as student and tutor assumptions and understandings of assignments and their feedback on student’s written work and, for the students themselves, the importance of their own ‘identity’ as writers rather than simply of skills in becoming an academic writer. The third theme is as a broadly institutional level and concerns the implications of modularity, assessment and university procedures on student writing.

These three themes, focused broadly on students, student–tutor interactions, and the institution, now need to be examined more fully against the changing ‘fields of study’ and students’ ‘course switching’ to which we have referred. All these, we argue, are located in relations of power and authority and are not simply reducible to the skills and competences required for entry to, and success within, the academic community. The current movement away from traditional academic disciplines and subject areas, within which academic staff have conceptualised their own and their students’ writing practices, makes a broader perspective critical in understanding the ‘problems’ being identified in student writing. Without such a perspective,

3

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?
The Messages Conveyed to Students by Tutors’ Written Comments

Roz Ivančić, Rawly Clark and Rachel Rimmerman

Introduction

Students receive an immense variety of types of response to their writing, all carrying different messages about university values and beliefs about the role of writing in learning, about their identity as a student, and about their own competence and even character. It must be very difficult for them to know what they are supposed to make of some of these responses to how to respond to them. Our aim in this chapter is to identify some of the range of ways of responding to student writing, and to reveal some of the messages carried by these different types of response. We hope we will stimulate all tutors who have responsibility for responding to students’ writing to evaluate their practices critically, and to recognise the sorts of effects their responses may have on the forthcoming writers in their charge.

1 The data for this paper comprise a selection of responses by tutors to student writing from those we have collected from no academic settings: our own university in the UK and the communication skills unit in an African university. However, the practices to which we are referring are not confined to the contexts from which these examples are taken, and other issues of relevance to those concerned with academic literacies in higher education worldwide.

There are five subject tutors who teach a range of subjects within the social sciences at Lancaster University. All the subject tutors have to ‘mark’ in the sense of ‘grade’; to write a number to evaluate the work on a given scale. Of the four English for academic purposes (EAP) tutors whose work we refer to, some work in the UK university, others in the African university. The circumstances in which they work (rather than the differences between their institutions) are not responsible for the way of responding to students’ writing. Two of the EAP tutors (A and B) teach compulsory communications skills classes in which the assessment counts towards the students’ final degree. In this respect these two EAP tutors are rather like
subject tutors, except that they must assess the writing in terms of its success as communication, rather than in terms of what it communicates. Tutors' situation is similar, in that their course is compulsory and graded. The difference is that she uses the 'process approach' to the teaching of writing, which involves a lot of dealing, discussion and rewording towards the production of final versions of writing. She sets students academic tasks such as argumentative essays, critical reviews and research papers on 'general domain' topics such as AIDS and pollution. Tutors D, by contrast, works in an academic support programme, running workshops and individual tutorials designed to support students in the writing they are required to do across the university. This provision is not compulsory, but available to any student choosing to take advantage of it. Work undertaken on the academic support programme is not part of the students' accreditation, and consequently is not graded.

The chapter discusses the following aspects of responses to student writing:

- different styles of response;
- the nature and purpose of responses;
- the possible messages students may receive from different types of response;
- implications for student staff development and for EAP provision.

In each section we will draw attention to differences between subject tutors' and EAP tutors' responses.

**Different styles of response**

Table 3.1 compares the overall content and style of nine sample responses, selected to cover a wide variety of types of response. It shows that responses vary enormously in quantity. The quantity depends, of course, partly on how much time tutors have. However, we suggest that the amount of time and detail tutors put into their responses to students' work depends primarily on their values, their beliefs about the nature of university education, about the role of writing in learning, and about the role of the responses in all this. They will have developed particular working practices to support these beliefs. Those tutors who give minimal responses perhaps see the task of reading students' writing as largely administrative, and/or do not consider students to have the sort of role in the academic community which merits engaging in dialogue with them. Those who give a lot of feedback must believe that reading and responding to students' work serves more than just an administrative purpose. We will develop this idea in the rest of this section and the next.

The tutors' circumstances, values, beliefs and working practices become particularly interesting when we consider the relationship between specific textual comments and general comments, and where the comment is written. Reading tutors' writing at different stages can provide valuable insights into how teachers organize their courses in such a way that they have time to see their students' writing in progress, enormously desirable

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**Table 3.1 Nine different styles of response to student writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Specific comments</th>
<th>General comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A grade only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor B</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Three-fives in black ink at the end of the essay, plus grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor C</td>
<td>An occasional tick in the margin in red ink</td>
<td>One line written in red ink at the end of essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor D</td>
<td>27 numbers on the text in pencil, with handwritten notes in pencil on a separate sheet</td>
<td>More than 25 lines at the beginning of the word-processed notes, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor E</td>
<td>20 numbers on the text in pencil, with word-processed notes on a separate sheet, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
<td>'Fair' at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor A</td>
<td>Communication Skills Course</td>
<td>Specific wordchoices, many lines of criticism, often read over student's text in red pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor B</td>
<td>Communication Skills Course</td>
<td>Exclusive positive comments and suggestions in green pen at the margin of the text and on the topic and context of the paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor C</td>
<td>Communication Skills Course, Process Approach</td>
<td>About half a page of positive comments and suggestions for development at the end of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor D</td>
<td>Academic Support Programme</td>
<td>Up to 50 numbers on the text in pencil, with matching numbered notes, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though this would be, in all but the rarest of cases, subject tutors are looking at a final product of the writing process, and are reading with the primary aim of grading. This may explain the fact that, on the whole, subject tutors seem to focus more on general comments. All of them put a grade at the end, and all except one subject tutor see something to offer that grade. Subject tutors vary enormously, however, in whether and how much they respond to the details of what the students have written. Subject tutors A and B appear not to see any purpose in reading and responding to their students' writing other than to contribute to the summative process. Subject tutors D and E, by contrast, provide a large quantity of numbered responses to the text itself - so many, in fact, that they are written on a separate sheet. The quantity of these specific comments on the text indicates that these tutors believe that they should be engaging with what the students have written, as well as assessing it. The fact that the comments are written on a separate sheet is significant, too. One reason for using a separate sheet is to ensure that the comments are as legible as possible - they are very obviously intended to be read. They have the status of a separate document: a message specifically from the tutor to the student about their work, rather than 'marking' in the sense of 'putting marks on' - deducting - what the students have written. We suggest that the separate document is more respected by the students' writing than comments written directly on it.

The first EAP tutors may make more of the balance between general and specific comments, and in the place of these comments. EAP tutors' B's style is, perhaps, typical of the uncertainty or insecurity on the part of many tutors. In what, exactly, the status or function of their responses is. EAP tutors C and D, by contrast, are working with a very clear view of what they are doing and why. They share the 'writing, not marking' philosophy associated with the 'process approach' to the teaching of writing (see Freedman 1980 for reading students' writing as largely administrative, and/or do not consider students to have the sort of role in the academic community which merits engaging in dialogue with them. Those who give a lot of feedback must believe that reading and responding to students' work serves more than just an administrative purpose. We will develop this idea in the rest of this section and the next.

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Both subject tutor E and EAP tutor D write their responses with the express intention of discussing them in a one-to-one tutorial session with the student writer. By inviting students to discuss their responses, these tutors are giving the message that they do not have the last word on what the students have written; their comments are not final but part of a dialogue.

The choice of writing implement is interesting, too. In our sample, these include pencil, black ink, red pen and word processor. It may be interesting to suggest that these choices make a difference, but some students have said to us that they don't notice the difference. Anything written in pencil suggests tentativeness; it can be discussed, rubbed out, altered. It also suggests effort, even collaboration, between subject tutor and student: the pencil marks are there to help the students rather than to put them in their place. At the other extreme is the red pen. This is conventionally the symbol of teachers' negative knowledge and their right to make unchallengeable judgements. The black ink represents, perhaps, the least difference between the tutor and the student - they are using the same writing implements; they are on equal terms in a joint project. The word processor is a new form of technology to use for responding to students' writing. By using a word processor, subject tutor E shows both consideration for her students and an understanding that she thinks it is fine for them to read her detailed comments. On the face of it, the word processor seems to be a relatively neutral tool for the task. However, some students have recently pointed out to us that wordprocessed text seemed formal, fixed and inflexible: then do not have the personal, provisional quality of the pencil-and-paper technology.

**The nature and purpose of responses**

In this section we show how responses can serve many different functions, both intentionally and unintentionally. We analyse the actual nature and wording of selected comments to subject tutors B, C, D and E, and by EAP tutors B and D, reproduced on the following pages. You may like to read these before moving on to our analysis. We are purposefully focusing on samples which include negative comments, as these allow us to discuss a wider range of issues.

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**SUBJECT TUTOR B**

**General Comment**

(1) You make a number of good points but don't really answer the question.

(2) You need to pay more attention to the structure of your essays.

---

**SUBJECT TUTOR C**

**General Comment**

(1) This is a very satisfactory essay.

(2) However, your arguments are undermined by the use of the personal pronoun.

(3) ... is an established authority - or not yet, anyway.

(4) Avoid the use of passive nouns and expressions like 'in my view' in all academic work.
SUBJECT TUTOR D

Specific Comments:
(1) Unnecessary words.
(2) This paragraph contains many points each of which you could discuss in more detail.
(3) ‘and’? These are the same thing!
(4) Whatever ‘poetic’ means! This is culturally and historically determined.
(5) means the same: avoid unnecessary repetition.
(6) You already made this up. In the last para.
(7) This part is bracketed needs explaining. Difficult for whom? Which dialect?
(8) Good point!
(9) Good to mention values. Here you only talk about the value people place on different types of language. (More interesting)?
(10) Not quite ‘needs’ more “technology”.

EAP TUTOR B

Specific Comments:
(1) Puts “?” in the margin.
(2) ‘Are you sure?’ in the margin beside a factual comment.
(3) Crosses them out and rewrites. 
(4) Writes “incomplete sentence”.
(5) Puts a tick in the margin.
(6) Writes “who?” above a pronoun.
(7) Puts ‘ap’ to indicate misspellings.
(8) Writes ‘not clear’ in the margin.
(9) Puts a line in the margin.

SUBJECT TUTOR E

General Comment:
(1) It is clear that you have considered the topic seriously and you have identified and illustrated three very important ways in which learners encounter frustration.
(2) Moreover you suggest a number of measures that teachers could take to avoid such learner frustration.
(3) I wanted you to go into more detail about these measures and I feel that, although your analysis stems from your HTS, some of your proposals are more theoretical than they are practical.
(4) I wanted to know more about how you intend to operationalise your ideas.
(5) I think that you rather unfairly make the teacher to be the ‘villain’ and the ‘transgressor’ and the learner the aggrieved, innocent ‘victim’.
(6) I am thus a bit worried about the balance of your assignment.
(7) I quite agree that it is right and proper that learners’ rights and preferred learning strategies are researched but I wonder if you do not somewhat underestimate the extent that is put upon the teacher by the institution and society to build on what learners bring to the classroom in attempting to augment these skills and knowledge.
(8) There are one or two occasions when I find it difficult to follow your logic and sometimes I feel your argument over-relies on an emotional appeal rather than on effective and considered thought.
(9) However, I suppose we all have such feelings and I feel rather charitably putting this forward as criticism.
(10) The tricky bit is how to productively turn these feelings into plausible and acceptable action.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

(8) Be whom, where, and why? 
(9) All your own thoughts? 
(10) Do you want to avoid alien language? 
(11) Doesn’t this contradict what you said on page 2? 
(12) Yes, but you haven’t said WHY. 
(13) Why are you passing?! 
(14) Is this the best text here?

General Comment:
I found this very interesting and learned a lot! With a bit more work – mainly explaining your arguments – this should be fine, as far as I am a ‘non-expert’ I can tell.

We propose that responses fall into the following six categories:

- explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses;
- correct or edit the student’s work;
- evaluate the match between the student’s essay and an ‘ideal’ answer;
- engage in dialogue with the student;
- give advice which will be useful in writing the next essay;
- give advice on rewriting the essay.

Of course, we cannot be sure that the tutors themselves would agree with our analysis, nor that the students who received these comments will have read them all in the way we do here. Zve (1984) has suggested that students often interpret ‘interested response’ comments as evaluations.

Explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses

This function appears in all the subject tutors’ comments, for reasons we have already discussed. Table 5.2 summarises the way in which the subject tutors’ comments explain the grade.

All the tutors are making both positive and negative comments, although paying far more attention to the negative – perhaps to ensure the students know the weaknesses of their work so that they do not challenge a relatively low grade. The key difference between subject tutors B and C on the one hand, and D and E on the other, is that D and E indicate precisely what was wrong or weak. For example, subject tutor D’s student knows that what she wrote at point 1 is one of the good points mentioned in comment 27, whereas subject tutor E’s student only knows that she ‘made a number of good points’, but does not know which they were.

It is particularly interesting to contrast subject tutor E with all the others in the way they worded their comments; subject tutor E is the only one who
phrased his comments explicitly as his personal view. He used the words ‘I’ and ‘me’ 12 times in the extract from his comments, particularly in the overall comment, and in detailed comment 1. He makes his evaluations subjective by using expressions such as:

I find it difficult to follow your logic.
I want you to know.
I'm not sure what you mean by...
I don't think I personally would...
It is.

This seems to me to suggest that the EAP tutors in our sample do not put a grade on the work, to which they are responding. EAP tutor B, in particular, is required to recommend a grade on the best of draft, but at this point she does not want to give an indication of what grade might be. In so far as they judge at all, it is to give indications of what might affect their grade, and to encourage the writers by indicating the positive features of what they have written. EAP tutor D, particularly, makes sure that she includes very positive comments alongside any suggestions for improvement.

Evaluate the match between the student's essay and an 'ideal' answer

This function and the next are both based on the underlying belief that the tutor is the arbiter of what is right. Under this heading we focus on the area of thing which are particularly the prerogative of subject tutors to judge. There is, we suggest, a continuum from the sort of academic assignment which clearly gives an ideal answer to questions of open-ended assignment in which a wide range of answers are possible. The majority of assignments in the social sciences are probably at the open-ended pole of the continuum; this is certainly the case for the assignments in our sample. However, even for open-ended assignments, tutors often indicate that what the student has written falls short in some way of what they would have judged as 'good' or 'ideal'. Subject tutor B gives a hint that there is an ideal way of answering, if not an ideal answer, by writing '[you] don't really answer the question'. There are some hints in subject tutor D's response: comments 21 and 24 are telling the student what she should have written on these specific topics, and comment 28 is telling her something about how she should have written the essay. Subject tutor E also indicates what would have pleased him more: notice the expressions in his general comments 'I wanted you to...
...to give more detail' (sentence 3) and 'I wanted to know more about' (sentence 5). In his detailed comment 28 he indicates what he would have judged as 'correct' or 'good' when he writes 'Therefore maybe there ought to be...
...These show the student that there was something different she might have written which would have been better in the tutor's eyes.

The scare quotes around the word 'ideal' signal that there is no 'ideal' answer in social sciences and humanities writing assignments. But a given tutor might have strong views about what to expect in a good assignment, and in such cases students who want a good mark need to put some effort into seeming out how their tutor would assess their own question, what the tutor's ideas, preferences and 'obsessions' are (Rimmer and Shaw 1999).

Correct or edit the student's work

 Compared with the two previous categories, very few of the subject tutors' comments in our sample are aimed at correcting or improving the student's work; perhaps only subject tutor D's comment 5, and subject tutor E's comment 4. EAP tutor B, however, is clearly focusing on this function. All except, perhaps, the first comment are corrections. We do not want to suggest that this observation on our sample represents a clear distinction between the aims and purposes of subject tutors and of EAP tutors. It is, in fact, quite common to find subject tutors who see it as their business to edit and correct students' work as much as judging grades, but we have not included any in our sample. Similarly, there are many EAP tutors who do not see this as their primary aim when responding to students' work. EAP tutor D is an example.

Engage in dialogue with the student

Although this sounds as if it should be the major function of tutors' responses, we have found it to be surprisingly rare. Subject tutor D shows an interest in engaging in debate over certain facts, but it is always reached in terms of a belief or opinion disagreement with what the student has written. Her comments 4, 7, 9, 11, 12 and 23 all engage with the content of the work the student has written, but they are full of directives that what she put in the first place was insufficient, controversial or wrong.

There is plenty of evidence in subject tutor B's comments that he sees engaging in debate with the student as one of his aims. In his general comments, the tutor says, 'I wanted you to...
...to give more detail' (sentence 3), and 'I wanted to know more about' (sentence 7) invite further discussion. His detailed comments 1, 3 and 24 are long and thus contributions to dialogue, focusing on his reaction as a reader (comment 1) and on other possible ways of seeing the issues (comments 3 and 24). Comments 1 and 4 include questions the hallucination of open-endedness.

EAP tutor D's comments also contain lots of questions (comments 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14). She engages with the student in dialogue about content, but to a lesser extent than subject tutor E. In her detailed comments 2, 4, 8 and 11 are asking for elaboration and elucidation of the content from the perspective of an interested reader rather than an immune discipline specialist. However, she also engages in discussions with the writer about linguistic choices and matters of presentation and form: her comments 7, 9, 10, 13 and 14 are examples of this.

EAP tutor D's comment 5 is particularly interesting as an example of engaging in dialogue with the student. She comments 'Not sure what you mean here', asking the student what she means, rather than making a correction based on some fixed meaning of the word. She is simply identifying a part which she did not understand and leaving the question of whether and how it needs to be improved up to discussion. This contrasts strongly with subject tutor D's comment 5. "Means the same: avoid unnecessary repetition" and EAP tutor B's practice of crossing out and rewriting the student's writing. It is all too common for tutors to correct or edit student's work on the basis of their assumptions: too much productive, and less dangerous, we suggest, to talk about what students usually are trying to mean something, that we do not necessarily know what that intended meaning is, that our job is to find out what it is and help them find a way of expressing it (see Zemel 1985).

Give advice which will be useful in writing the next essay

Some subject tutors' comments very explicitly have this aim. Subject tutor B's second sentence: 'You need to pay more attention to the structure of your essay', and subject tutor C's last sentence. 'Avoid the use of personal pronouns and expressions like "in my view" in all academic work', are typical cases of this. They are giving blunt statements of advice about what the student must do to improve their essay. Other of the problems with this is that advice such as subject tutor B's does not give any indication of how the student is to achieve what he is recommending. Another problem is that the advice that one tutor gives may not only apply when writing for another tutor. Subject tutor C's advice contradicts what other tutors actually accept in the same department.

In addition, some comments can be seen as advice for future essays, even if not phrased as such. For example, several of subject tutor D's negative comments could be interpreted in ways which are sufficiently general as to constitute advice for writing a future essay. Obvious examples are comments 1, 5 and 25 - criticisms of this essay which amount to guidelines to be followed for all essays. The EAP tutors do not make any overt mention of learning from this essay for the future. However, several of their comments can be associated with general advice: most of EAP tutor B's comments could be translated into a checklist of things for the learner to consider in many places in many essays, for example:

1. Be sure to contextualize.
2. Tell your reader your intentions, and your line of argument.
3. Give concrete examples to back up your arguments.
4. Ask yourself: why this now? – ensure it is clear to the reader why you have included a particular point, a particular place.
5. Decide your position on social language and stick to it.
6. Where you put forward an argument or point of view, say WHY you think this way.
7. If you use a passive, be sure there is a reason.

Give advice on rewriting this essay

All the EAP tutors in our sample are responding to drafts of essays, and the comments of EAP tutors B and D function explicitly as advice on rewriting the essay. By contrast, none of the subject tutors in our sample were responding to drafts of essays, so strictly speaking this category is irrelevant for them. However, subject tutors sometimes respond as if the student were going to rewrite the essay. Subject tutor B's comments 7 and 10, and subject tutor E's detailed comment 4 appear to be giving advice on improving this essay, but it was in fact the final version. This kind of advice – very specific, but too late – is very common. Specific advice on one essay can only be useful for writing the next (probably quite different) one if the student is able to generalize from it.

Conclusion

We suggest that tutors' research in this paper is about student writing has a powerful shaping effect on the nature of their comments. Even though the comments are subject tutors' comments, and those by EAP tutors D are similar in style (as we pointed out earlier), there is a striking contrast in the particular way they are worded. This can be explained, we suggest, by the fact that the subject tutors made in the late essay the comments are more specific to justify their grades, whereas the EAP tutors have more development aims of helping the student revise her essay.
An implication of our study is that tutors do not always give a great deal of thought to what they are attempting to achieve through their responses to students’ writing. Tutors may fear neglecting the opportunity to fulfill some of the possible functions. Some are slipping from one function to another, with little or no regard to the aims they are trying to achieve. Looking at this from the point of view of the students on the receiving end, we do indeed wonder what they are expected of them. It is not surprising that they find such responses confusing, do not appreciate their purposes and are unable to benefit fully from them.

The possible messages students may receive

Turner’s (1953) study of students’ reactions to feedback at Lancaster University suggests that most students do try to make sense of the responses they receive. He found that, while some students felt daunted by detailed comments, others were frustrated by being left unaided. They complained that they do not receive enough feedback, that what they get is not comprehensive enough, that it is not helpful, nor logical, or not timely. Some students talked about feeling ‘victimized’ by detailed responses, or they talked about insufficient, or too much feedback of a valuable learning opportunity. Studies by Baddeley and Swales (1988), Cohen and Casabianca (1987), and Lied (1988) provide further evidence of this discussion.

If students are going to take their tutors’ responses seriously, then it matters how much they contain. We will consider here what messages might be conveyed to students by different types of response: messages about themselves, messages about the functions of academic essay writing, and messages about the values and beliefs which underpin universities as institutions.

Messages about themselves

The ideology of educational institutions in most countries is that tutors are superior to students, and everything teachers write will inevitably be affected by this power differential. Tutors like to feel powerful. Unless there is a positive active challenge to this belief (their own and their students’) that they are superior, their comments, like everything else they do, will reproduce and reinforce it. Like all ideologies, this effect works insidiously, below the level of consciousness; not all tutors intend to reinforce their positions of power over students. As a result of the power differential, whoever the tutors’ intentions, students are likely to read their responses for possible evaluations of themselves.

Messages about university values and beliefs

Styles of response differ in the messages they convey about the values and beliefs which operate within the institution. Tutors’ responses to students’ writing can convey messages that values and beliefs are absolute, culturally specific, or functional. Some present conventions as absolute values of the academic community as a whole — comments such as ‘Don’t use “we” in your text’ in academic work — Others present conventions as determined by ‘neutral’ functional considerations — comments such as ‘A new pair would be helpful here’.

Tutors’ comments convey messages about students’ and tutors’ roles and relationships, about the nature of knowledge, and about academic conventions. As we have shown, different types of response convey different beliefs about the role of a student in the academic community, ranging from being a fully fledged member with authentic knowledge-making rights, to being on the margins, scarcely a member of the community at all. There are also varying messages about the relations of power and status between students and tutors. Comments can foreground the inequality which results from tutors’ roles as assessors, as subject tutors A-D do. Alternatively, they can foreground collaborative aspects of the tutor–student contract, as EAP tutor D’s comments do.

Some responses give the impression that there are right and wrong answers, right and wrong perspectives, of right and wrong views — some of supervisors’ comments are examples of this. Such comments convey an objective view of knowledge. The alternative is for tutors to value and respect their students’ contributions to what students are told to view and to place their own views in the first person, as subject tutors E and EAP tutor D do. These contrasting practices represent knowledge as subjective. Comments can reveal beliefs about the relative value of knowledge and wisdom: whether the work of academics is to create and reproduce a body of knowledge and information, or to enable and direct use of wisdom and understanding. Most of the detailed responses in our sample value wisdom and understanding rather than knowledge, with the possible exception of subject tutor D’s. More specifically, comments convey messages about such things as what counts as sufficient justification for a particular point, what counts as an acceptable argument, what counts as an adequate explanation. These micro-messages are more likely to be discipline-specific, but some may be framed as values of the academic community as a whole.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

More generally, responses can also convey ideological messages about the extent to which the institution is monolithically authoritarian or open to diversity and change. We suggest that responses which do not admit or encourage alternative courses of action have the covert effect of validating orthodoxy. They suggest that the institution is omnipotent and unchallengeable. In contrast, responses which leave matters of content and purpose open to question support an ideology of pluralism and the possibility of change.

Some suggestions for improving the feedback process

The main implication of what we have been discussing is that success at university involves a great deal more than just ‘skills’. Students need to feel that they are dealing with a ‘true kit’ in order to find out the values and practices of universities, and to locate themselves within them (see Clark and Island 1997, especially Chapter 4).

Implications for subject staff development

We are all reluctant to make changes in our work practices unless we can find meaning in the changes (Fullan 1993). Any programme of staff development needs to be sensitive to tutors’ concerns about what their role is in the institution, about their workload, about what students must need help with in writing. It needs to address their beliefs (for example, about their role as educators), their values (for example, about what is worth their while to spend time on), and their understandings (for example, about the nature of the writing process) and not just the changes that they do, but why they believe that they do it in that way. So, for example, if tutors say that they believe students already know how to write cases, or they would not have gained a place in higher education, workshops could explore tutors’ own experiences of learning to write, and the ways in which they faced on the road to academic community membership. If tutors say they feel under undue pressure to produce research and publication, and that giving detailed feedback on student writing would take more time than they could spare, workshops could examine ways that tutors could work together. If they say they are doing too many marking jobs, they could look at who marks and what marks are made of to ask what can be done to alleviate this.

In our experience, staff could benefit from being made more aware of the issues raised in this paper. The following are some points which are particularly worth emphasising on staff development courses:

• give thought to quality, quantity and timescale of feedback — if necessary, change the way we mark so as to be more sensitive to their needs and to provide more feedback at times when the students can use it. Possibly set fewer essays and respond to drafts as well as to final versions.
Implications for EAP provision

All the points listed above are relevant to EAP tutors when they respond to student writing. In addition, EAP tutors might develop courses which help students to become 'ethnographers' of the new communities they are entering (see Clark 1992; 1999; Clark and Bussi 1991; Clark et al 1990). This would include helping them to develop strategies for finding out what criteria will be operating in the assessment of their writing, what styles of response their tutors use, and what they are supposed to make of them. One way of doing this is for students to look at past essays from particular courses, respond to and 'evaluate' them, and then look at and discuss the tutor's comments and evaluation.

The kinds of comments we have identified from both subject tutors and EAP tutors suggest that much useful feedback can be given on writing as communication by an interested reader without drawing on subject expertise, so EAP tutors could build on this by facilitating peer feedback on student writing. Not only could this approach reduce the time involved in one-to-one work, it would also send messages about community membership and ownership of conventions to students who participate.

EAP tutors need to do a great deal more than just judging students' writing as right or wrong by some mythical criteria of communicative competence. It is important to recognize variety in academic practice: those of us working in this area should be concerned with the actual tasks which students are currently engaged in, and should examine these practices critically, both for ourselves and with our students.

EAP tutors might also try to encourage students themselves to demand more, better and more timely feedback. Work with students focusing on how to obtain the kind of feedback they think they need might be an important way of handing some of the choices about feedback back to those who will use it. As one of the undergraduate students referred to earlier put it (in Rimmershaw 1993):

After all, tutors often express what they expect from their students in terms of length, references, presentation of essay, so should we not be able to express our needs in terms of responding to our work?

Note

1. The ideas in this chapter originated in an activity conducted by Rachel at Lancaster University in which a group of undergraduate students analysed some tutors' comments on a class assignment. Rachel then presented some of the issues and outcomes to the Teaching of Writing Group. Jenny and I developed these into a workshop for a colloquium at the Communicative Skills Unit, University of Durham. We are grateful to the students involved, other members of the Teaching of Writing Group and colleagues in Durham for their contributions to the development of these ideas.
Part 2

New Forms of Writing in Specific Course Contexts

4

Computer Conferencing: New Possibilities for Writing and Learning in Higher Education

Mary R. Lea

Introduction

Within today’s higher education moves towards teaching on-line are becoming increasingly common. Computer conferencing is now being used in both distance learning and more traditional university settings. Although there is a substantial body of research which is concerned with computer conferencing and student learning (Skeen and Kay 1989; Mason 1995; O’Connell 1994; Maag 1996; Lea and Street 1998), it appears that very little is known, as yet, about the nature of these written texts from a linguistic perspective and, more particularly, the relationship between students’ use of computer conferencing and their assessed written work. In these new learning domains both students and tutors are having to become familiar with new ways of constructing knowledge through writing. In this chapter I hope to explore the part that this new form of written communication might play in student learning. I do this by examining a number of different conceptual frames to help gain a greater understanding of the relationships between knowledge, language forms and the genre conventions involved in learning. I conclude with some implications of exploring these texts for practitioners who are interested in using computer conferencing in their own course design, delivery and assessment.

The research reported upon here is less concerned with the collaborative and social nature of learning than with the part that conference interactions can play in the construction and negotiation of academic knowledge. It draws on data from two different Open University courses and builds upon other work which has examined the complexity of academic literacy practices in higher education (Geeder 1994; Street 1995; Lea and Street 1998). Other authors in this volume explore the notion that academic literacy practices are central to the construction of academic knowledge (Burslem, Chapter 1; Pachner, Chapter 8; McMillan, Chapter 9; Street, Chapter 11). I draw on
a similar theoretical perspective in order to examine learning in these new environments and suggest that we need to understand more about the kinds of literacy practices that students engage in when they are using computer conferencing for learning. In other words, what kind of writing is this, what kinds of relationships between tutors and students are implicated in this writing, and what part it is playing in the process of learning and teaching?

Computer conferencing is being used by academic staff in higher education in a number of different ways. It can be an integral part of course design where the course is actually delivered online, either completely or partially. In this instance students have no choice about whether to contribute to the course or not. Alternatively, tutors may set up a computer conference to provide a forum where students may discuss both academic and more general issues under other's tutor the course and with the tutor. In this case contributing to the conference may be an optional activity for students. Conferencing can also be used by tutors as the main way of discussing academic issues and giving feedback to students – for example, postgraduate research students studying at a distance. The way in which a conference is being used will depend in part upon the nature of the course and whether it is being delivered in a face-to-face or distance situation. I concentrate here upon two distance learning courses being delivered by the Open University, UK. These courses have been chosen as examples because they embody rather different and contrasting academic content and contexts.

A433: Philosophical Problems of Equality is a fourth-year (equivalent to final year) undergraduate philosophy course, in which students are required to use computer conferencing as part of their studies. Students access the conference via First Class, a closed internet system. Some face-to-face tutorial support is also available. Students have access to their own tutor group conference, as well as to particular sub-conferences on each written assignment. Students are encouraged to make contributions concerning their course to their tutor's conference, in a sense mimicking a face-to-face seminar. As one tutor put it when interviewed:

The idea is that the conference should be a substitute for the academic discussion that students would get in a traditional university. The idea of the discussion is to test students' understandings and to try out the constructions of philosophical arguments.

Students also have access to a national conference for A433 and to a 'Philosophers' chat area for all philosophy students in the Open University. The main body of the course is delivered through traditional print-based course materials, and it is quite possible for students to follow and complete the course without making any conference contributions.

A1802: Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education is a rather different course to A433. It is a module of the Open University's MA in open and distance learning and it is delivered primarily via the Web. This course uses a Web-based electronic bulletin board system for conferencing, and the conferencing is used as a major site of learning for participants on the course. Students are divided into four different tutor groups, with tutors acting as 'facilitators'. Unlike traditional print-based distance learning courses, students on this course have little in the way of ready-prepared printed material. Instead they have access to Web-based resources and links to other relevant Web sites. Students on this course are expected to use these resources to collect information on tutorial themes and to contribute to the conferencing. Students are required to show evidence of use of conferencing when setting their assignments. The course guide suggests that:

The amount of time you will spend reading set material is much reduced from normal OU courses, and the amount of time you will spend in practical activities, online interaction, collaborative work and Web searching is much increased.

... working in this way is different from learning through studying traditional print materials.

New forms of text

Goodman and Graff (1996) explore the increasing use and importance of multimedia texts which, unlike traditional written texts, use devices from more than one semiotic mode of communication simultaneously. Writing and images, pictures and photographs for example, are brought together in one text, and making sense of the text involves the reader in making sense of, and creating meaning from, all the different parts of the complete text. Goodman and Graff suggest that such texts are becoming increasingly important in global communications. In the two courses being reported upon here, in order to make the most appropriate use of these new learning environments, students have to learn how to negotiate what are usefully described as multimodal texts. They have to use a knowledge of both visual and written codes in order to become successful participants in these conference settings.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the relationship between these two codes. It shows the conference desktop which uses the Open University's First Class internet conferencing system. Students enter the tutor conference for their tutor on A433 by clicking on the appropriate icon – for example, A433 Ian's confe-
rence. Additionally they can enter a number of other general conference areas where they can communicate with students and tutors from other tutor groups – for example, A433 Equality, Philosophy. (The icon for which does not appear directly on this desktop) is designated for non-
academic matters, not directly related to the substantive content of the course. Below these icons, representing different 'areas' of the course, stu-
dents and tutors make their contributions. Clicking on the message icons to the left of the contributor's name enables participants to read or reply

Figure 4.2 shows the planer area for 11802. It, too, has its own designed

into the messages (for the purposes of anonymity, the participants' names have been removed).}

Figure 4.2 shows the planer area for 11802. It, too, has its own designed

tutor group spaces and a plenary discussion area for general course issues; students can also contribute to the 'Café' on more social chat issues.

Notice the welcome message from one of the course tutors.

At first sight these created spaces appear neutral and arbitrary, merely

a place within which written communication can take place between student

and student, or students and tutors. But the organization of the conference

in terms of different virtual spaces and rooms has important impacts

in terms of where knowledge is being constructed, but also what kind of knowledge it is. Participants have choices to make about where to post messages – in which space or room. Students and tutors can take on a number of different roles and identities depending upon the choices that they make around time and space when to post, how, where and whom. They may choose to compose a detailed message offline or make an immediate response to a posting. The conferencing structure results in participants engaging in a variety of practices; these practices have implica-
tions for the kind of knowledge that is eventually recorded as a confer-
cing conversation. As with the text, the context in which the confer-
encing takes place. They may differ in ways that are relevant to the

conference setting. If students feel confident that their contribution is academically valid they will choose to 'post' in the tutor conference. They

may then decide whether the contribution is more suitable for a 'space'

reserved for messages around written assignments or the general tutor con-
ference. Alternatively they may not feel confident about their postings to the tutor conference and post to the national A433 Equality conference which ensures that their contribution is not directed at their own individual tutor. The interface can, therefore, be used to recreate something akin to the contents that speakers normally depend upon to make sense of every-
day face-to-face conversations. The spaces constructed within the confer-
encing reflect the different contexts that speakers naturally 'read off' in
everyday conversation. They also reflect the different relationships of power
and authority that are embedded in academic settings, particularly the rela-
tionships between tutors and students.

In a different context, that of spoken language, Dell Hymes' work

focuses on the 'ethnography of communication'. His analysis is valuable,

however, when exploring the different roles of communication in

computer conferencing.
be concerned with speakers' shared conceptualized knowledge of the different elements that go to make up a speech act, including writing,ic; prioritization, character, norm, and context. To get a more complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference might play in student learning and to do so primarily to support such communication is not considered a complex feature of communication. Thus, a difficult question often arises in the discussion of the notion of 'communication.'

Hymes is primarily concerned with the role of language in the complete context.

One must take as context a community, or network of persons, investigating its communicative activities in a whole, so that any use of channels and codes takes place as a part of the resources upon which the members draw.

(Handes 1994: 11)

Following from Hymes, it is therefore important to explore all the different elements of the conference, including interactions not recorded by the written conference message itself, we run the risk of misleading this record for evidence of its small features and the resulting activities and exchanges of which this and the use of primary email between students or from student to tutor, which is not recorded in the conference history. In this instance, we can regard this use of a one-on-one email as a literacy practice and could easily explore the role that it might play in the learning process.

Once we start to regard participation in the conference as a 'communicative event on-line', evidence of communication within a 'speech' or 'discourse' community, we can begin to examine the ways in which students have to engage with a whole range of different practices - evidence of which is not always recorded - in order to become successful participants in the conference. Research carried out on the two courses initially included both informal telephone interviews as well as online questionnaires for students throughout their course. This has given a level of interest between face-to-face conferences and on-line interaction and online communication, and has enabled a more complete understanding of the different practices that are involved in the communication of academic knowledge. For example, students on all courses report the need to print off conference contributions so that they can highlight and annotate these written texts in ways which seem more familiar to them. Additionally, must do make substantial use of their conference postings but need time to reflect before preparing a contribution off-line, with all that entails in terms of redefining and editing texts, before the final considered 'product' is put on the conference.

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the fact that tutors were acting as facilitators. Not surprisingly, in many situations students are expected to make written assignments which are then graded as 'knowledge-based' even if their derivations are, on the face of it, not original or novel.

Work on written academic genres by Berliner and Haukkinen (1985) suggests that students who are expected complex relationships of power and authority between different academic communities, that these are far from static but remain shifting and changing. However, using conferencing provides students with opportunities to engage in a particular interpretation of their work. They seem to be suggesting that is the conference genre in which the social order which results in the breakdown of more traditional relationships between students and tutors. Evidence from the conference on the modeling of the written curriculum can be. In the written curriculum, the use of conferencing between and tutors, students and tutor, which is not the use of conferencing itself which enables students to develop the internally persuasive discourse that Cooper and Selfe value so highly. Equally important is the relationship which is facilitated in conferences by the way in which the technology is being used in a particularly way. In other words, it is not the use of conferencing itself which enables students to develop the initially persuasive discourse that Cooper and Selfe value so highly. Equally important is the relationship which is facilitated in conferences between tutors and students that are embedded within the conferences, and these are well suited to more traditional institutional and social expectations.

Whether we are doing more or replicating traditional ways of learning in conference settings depends upon the learning environments that are being created within each particular course. Inevitably, new environments replicate some aspects of traditional forms of learning and are still reflecting institutional and social relationships (Barthes). The tutor makes the conference an educational context, a system of communicating with each other and sharing ideas, therefore the tutor's role is not just to disseminate knowledge but to facilitate the learning process.

I think that what I am saying is that Hymes finds his principles of equal prospects for educational theories contradicting his different principles. The latter suggests we should do more what makes things worse for the equal prospects. But doing that might not be so obvious. I'm not sure that equal prospects at all. In other words, his equal opportunity principle might rule out our different difference principle. To either, in such a situation, he does what the difference principle requires, and breaks the equality of opportunity principle (this is the statement in the Sure Guide 'The argument supporting . . .') or be under fair opportunity of opportunity but thus breaks the difference principle (this is what

Developing academic knowledge

I return now to the idea that computer conference postings reflect the different relationships of power and authority that are embodied in academic settings. Cooper and Selfe (1993) suggest that computer conferencing is a new environment for learning, support the development of an 'ernonally democratic discourse', and that this can show the conference as a way of 'thinking against' conventional academic discourses. In this way students can rein the normative function of academic discourse and thereby the opportunity to challenge traditional authority. Cooper and Selfe (1993) focus upon the importance of talking and writing as a way of coming to terms with theories and concepts in their course - a writing course for undergraduates. By introducing their own perspectives in conferencing, students are able to have academic positionings, not the idea of a move away from the traditional role of teacher as expert is evidenced in much of the broader literature on the use of computer conferencing in the new role of the tutor is as facilitator.

The evidence from the interviews with students on A106 would suggest that whether such a shift takes place depends very much upon the academic context of the course and the kind and model of teaching and learning that is being adopted in the course. Although computer conferencing is likely to be presented both as a homogenous genre (Yates 1996) and as having a set of characteristics which enable the breakdown of traditional relationships in learning contexts (Masan and Kao 1989), this research points to the contrary position in conferencing that students are able to have academic positionings. The idea of a move away from the traditional role of teacher as expert is evidenced in much of the broader literature on the use of computer conferencing in the new role of the tutor is as facilitator.
more difficult to make. The academic context of the course and the use of the conferences for course delivery are not conceptually distinct. For example, analyses had been made about the content of collaborative learning or 'face-to-face' interaction experienced during the conferences and understanding 'online tasks' with other students; this work is then considered a contribution—many accessed only via the Web—by recognized authors in the field.

Epistemic modality and conference contributions

In order to explore the ways in which students negotiate academic knowledge through writing in the conference, I will use here the concept of 'modality' as a tool with which we can begin to examine the ways in which students position themselves in relation to knowledge in the conference. Modality is a term used by social linguists to indicate a speaker's attitude towards a proposition. Focus is often placed upon the use of modal auxiliaries such as 'must', 'mustn't', 'could', 'should' and 'need', in order to indicate a speaker's attitude towards what they are saying. The use of such auxiliaries indicates the speaker's epistemic modality as being 'open to the truth of what is being said. I have found Jennifer Coates's discussion of 'epistemic modality' to be helpful in this regard.

Coates (1997) maintains that the point is not just how speakers position themselves in relation to the truth of what is being said, but also how speakers position themselves in relation to the truth of the proposition expressed. Although her work focuses upon the social production of knowledge, it is a useful tool for understanding the way in which students position themselves in relation to the truth of the proposition expressed. Although her work focuses upon the social production of knowledge, it is a useful tool for understanding the way in which students position themselves in relation to the truth of the proposition expressed.

Although on both courses students reported how much they had enjoyed contributing to the conferences, they expressed some disappointment with regard to the kinds of debate taking place and, additionally, how these debates were intended to feed into their written work. In A25, students were concerned about the level of academic debate taking place in the tutor conferences. As one student put it:

*I want more than a discussion I can get down the job!"

They were therefore concerned that conference interactions were in a sense not academically focused enough. Additionally, they were looking for the more contribution to get them on the right track. They found it difficult to value the contributions made by other students.

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capacity to conduct oneself in an appropriate manner and it is non-normative to say that women and only women have the qualities required to successfully do this work. This seems a quite ordinary exchange.

There is so much more to this than simply putting the issue to the issue of a logical defence of a non-linguistic principle. It involves how we want to live, to conduct our lives, in relation to each other, and the standards by which we act. I understand why you think this is the case. I believe that women would prefer not to have men in this job. But men would prefer not to have a woman working with them if the work involved heavy lifting. In both cases the feeling might be that the work was just not suitable for the person employed. Why should people of normal physical ability allow those of extreme abilities to make them feel incompetent in their daily lives? Who is being fair in deciding the acceptability of such practices? Is there a majority?

This student uses a number of linguistic devices which indicate his uncertainty about his own position on the issue of gender and academic knowledge. He explains his uncertainty by referring to a logical defence of his non-linguistic principle. He explains how he wants to live and conduct his life in relation to others and the standards we act by. He thinks that women would prefer not to have men in this job. He believes that men would prefer not to have women working with them if the work involved heavy lifting. In both cases the feeling might be that the work was just not suitable for the person employed. Why should people of normal physical ability allow those of extreme abilities to make them feel incompetent in their daily lives? Who is being fair in deciding the acceptability of such practices? Is there a majority?

The student begins the message by aligning his views with those of an earlier student in the conference: "I agree with you..." He then expands on this point, explaining how he feels that women are better suited to this type of work.

I contend that without some assessment of prior knowledge that a student brings into a collaborative activity or project, there is no way to assess the extent or even if there has been an appreciable growth in the learner's construction of knowledge. For example, bringing to this activity extensive use of collaborative activities to construct knowledge in my face-to-face classrooms, I can determine that what I am assessing is Collaborative Learning with less construction of new knowledge than had I been placed in the topic on Coates's Design of a third generation on-line course as compared to a conventional distance education course, an area in which I have little to no previous knowledge or experience. That is not to say that I can learn nothing from my colleagues here, but that it would have been more fruitful for filling in my gaps to be placed in the other group.

One student could enter this course knowing virtually nothing about our topic, with no prior knowledge of the course content. Another student, on the other hand, could enter with years of experience in the field, having written many papers and conducted extensive research. This student would bring a wealth of knowledge and understanding to the course, which could be very valuable to the other students in the class.

In common with the contributions from the student studying philosophy, this student expresses different levels of personal commitment to the academic course content. She does, however, make linguistic choices which indicate a much stronger commitment to her version of academic content than that of the A25 student. Her opening, "I agree with you..." sets up a strong position for her own commitment to the construction of knowledge in the course, while also opening the door for other students to contribute to the discussion. She also makes a number of categorical assertions: "there is no way..." and "it brings...".
she comes to discuss "prior knowledge" she again seems very committed to the "truth" of what she is seeing: "It is very subjective," I emphasize, "I use it" and "I do know," she appears to be confident about her presentation of academic content because of her own previous experience in this field. Her encouragement with "collaborative learning" as an academic context but it also feels as if the conference is giving her the space to contribute with a strong commitment to what she is presenting. This appears in contrast with the previous student's exploration of being "arbitrary." Of course, on H82B students are not merely learning about collaborative learning; in fact, what they are doing. They are not having to make decisions in their conference writing between academic content and "using the conference", as is the case in courses with more traditional academic content, such as A23.

**Linking conferences and assessment**

A novel feature of H82B is that explicit linkages are made between conference contributions and assessed written work. In this respect, then, students are expected to use conference contributions in their assignments. They are being asked to reflect upon their own understandings of the academic context and to make linkages between the written texts of the conference and the written texts that they have to complete for assessment. This is in contrast with A23 where, although the intention is that students will make implicit connections between what is learnt in the conference and their assignments, no formal assessment procedures link the two.

Students on H82B did, however, report that they often found it difficult to make the requisite linkage between the two kinds of writing. So why does it seem difficult for students to make connections between the written texts of the conferences and the texts that they have to write for assessment? We have shown how these texts embed particular relationships between both tutors and students and students and students. Additionally, I have indicated that students in both the conferences are characterized by different levels of modality, which are related to both participants' commitment to, and their own understanding of, academic knowledge. I have also suggested that the conferences support collaborative learning in a greater or lesser extent. Arguably the conferences embed new forms of writing, new genres with their own distinct features and associated practices. When we come to look at the assignments, in contrast to the conferences, the assignments tend to embed a very traditional academic 'essay' genre. Exit for H82B, assessment tasks are presented in familiar ways. Despite the fact that students are encouraged to make inferences to conference messages in their written work, the assignment questions are still prescribed by a traditional essay genre.

Group conferencing is an ideal medium for collaborative learning. Discuss.

**Directions**

So how can this kind of exploration help us to make better use of computer conferencing for learning? Writing in conferences can be a valuable learning experience but we need to be able to make explicit the connections between the different academic literacy practices associated, on the one hand, with the conference texts, and, on the other, with assessed written work. If we want to make the links between learning, conferencing and assessment we need to start with the processes of assessment and ask ourselves what we are assessing. It may not be enough to encourage students to engage with the academic 'content' of the conferences; we need to focus more specifically on developing students' literacy in terms of their own learning, which must include a reflective approach to academic content. Then all, of course, he sits such as H82B where it is more difficult to make a distinction between content and the process of reflectivity. In courses such as this, therefore, we are perhaps more willing to develop such links. In others, such as A23, where the academic content is more clearly delineated, we need to explore further the ways in which features of the technology are directly implicated in the kinds of propositional knowledge that students are constructing.

**Computer Conferencing**

Discuss the following quote from John Ilich (1971):

I intend to show that the inverse of school is possible: that we can depend on self-directed learning instead of employing teachers to belittle or compel the students to find the time or the will to learn that we can provide the learner with new links to the world instead of funneling all educational programs through the teacher... 'Network' is often used, unfortunately, to designate the channels reserved for materials selected by others... I wish I had another word... a synonym for 'educational verb'.

Students reported that there was an artificiality about viewing conference messages into assessed writing. This might result from the fact that students are being asked to make connections between two very different written genres - writing in the conference and writing for assessment - the only linkage being theirs to attempt to merge one into another. Since the more familiar way of approaching such a question would be the reference only to established authors, this may arguably have made it even more difficult for students to incorporate conference texts into their assessed work. There seem, then, to be no obvious connections between the new genres being explored and developed in the conferences and the old written genres being replicated in the assessment processes.

In order to address the restrictions that students are constrained in making adequate use of conferencing in their learning and ultimately in their writing for assessment, we must work together on understanding the relationship between the different elements of learning in these new environments:

- Understanding the specific academic content which is embedded in the learning environment. What disciplinary and subject matter is being explored in the conference? What assumptions are tutors making about teaching and learning the course?
- Understanding the nature of the contributions that students make to the conferences and how these embed particular commitments to and understandings of academic knowledge. As tutors, recognizing the importance of this is crucial: students' understandings in their learning. This may or may not mean replicating the features of more traditional formal lectures, depending on the particular academic content.
- Developing in students' skills and understanding of the conference the conference is or attempts to replicate or substitute for. We need to help students understand in which ways in which they can make connections between the conferences and their assessed work. This may mean more than asking students to weave evidence of conference contributions into written assessment. It is more...

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likely to mean a very different form of assessment altogether - for example, students keeping their own reflective log (see Cerrone, Chapter 13).

**Directions**

Exploring some of the more obvious textual features of conference contributions to different sites in this way might, hopefully, give us some clues as to why students find it difficult to make connections between writing in the conferences and writing for assessment. On the surface there are not the obvious connections for students to make between these two sets of contexts. In A23, for example, between traditional print-based material and assessed written work. In such circumstances, students often report looking to the print text to give themselves clues about how to approach their own writing (Lea 1998). In contrast, in the conference there are few of the familiar marks of authority that students are looking for. For example, the reference author to give validity to the text. This may, in part, account for why students on the philosophy course were looking for the authority of the tutor contributions. It appears that although the conference content is, in itself, not enough to make a reflective record of reflection on learning, such a record does not necessarily mean that there is an immediate or obvious value for students in terms of their own learning. At the same time, neither is it possible for students as a record of academic content. For the way that they generally regard printed, referenced course material.

**Computer Conferencing**

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Making Dancing, Making Essays: Academic Writing in the Study of Dance
Sally Mitchell, Victoria Marks Fisher, Lynne Hale and Judith Harding

This chapter is concerned with the practice of writing in a discipline where the primary activity apparently has nothing to do with writing – the activity of dance. Dancers are physical. Many would say that they think with their bodies, not with words. But words are also essential to dancing. They inhabit the experience of moving in space. They are to their bodies as words are to their minds. As such, they are to the writing of dance what words are to the writing of any other activity.

The first part of the chapter is based on interviews, observations and essay samples gathered from staff and second-year students in a university school of dance, while the second part draws on the experience of teaching a "slips" module for first-year dance students. The chapter examines some of the social, institutional, pedagogical and philosophical factors which influence students' writing and performance.

The study in the School of Dance focused on the kinds of writing that students were required to produce, the attitudes of staff and students and the difficulties encountered. In this chapter we look in particular at the writing required within the context of the choreography course. We want to

suggest that the disjunction between writing essays and making dance may not be as great as staff and students often perceive. By looking closely at a typical essay title from the course we offer a socially oriented explanation for the choreography and writing tasks, which draws on Harris's model of personal identity formation. We then describe the way writing functions in higher education to legitimize other forms of making. An analysis of a section of essay text suggests, however, that the writing does more than comment on the making of a dance, in fact it creates meaning which is both unique and part of a discourse (Davies 1993). This enables us to draw an analogy between writing and choreographing – an analogy which is then, in the latter part of the chapter, illustrated in practical work undertaken with students. The chapter ends with students' reflection on this work and with our own attempts to see the implications for improving writing support for students.

Writing in choreography

The small-scale study conducted in the university School of Dance looked at the experiences of second-year students taking core courses in critical studies and choreography for both of which an essay was required. For dance students, writing is an activity conducted with some anxiety, for choreography, it was not unusual to regard the essay as a distraction, an almost alien, to the intense creative and practical work the students were undertaking. In critical studies, however, where students learn how to analyse dance as text, the essay seemed to be 'the task in a relatively unproblematic way. In this chapter we concentrate on the writing required for the choreography course.

Seventy-five per cent of the assessment for the choreography course was accounted for, not surprisingly, by the choreographing of a dance. Each student had to arrange the choreography of a dance, an exercise which we assigned to second-year students, and to develop a dance from tentative beginnings to eventual performance. There were weekly group workshops at which the tutor introduced concepts and principles in choreography. On these occasions, students also had an opportunity to show work in progress and to receive feedback from the group. A video recording of the dance in progress then formed the basis of a more detailed discussion between tutor and choreographer. Formally the piece was performed to an audience of fellow students and staff and subject to a final assessment.

The remaining 25 per cent of the course assessment went to the writing of an essay. The tutor who considered the relevance of the course to be that students should 'discover their voice as artists', could see no connection between the writing task and the making of dance. For her the two activities were entirely separate. Choreographing was a creative activity involving the individual person, and writing was an impersonal formal exercise. It was with a sense of personal conflict that the dance brought her expectations in line with those she attributed to the academic.

I mean when I started it I expected, what I wanted to see out of it, was a passion for that piece of work. And I marked all the pieces with a passion for their piece with good marks, and the others low marks and I got it all wrong. So now I've learned the formula to look for like, a good introduction, that's quite critically written as a piece, so the conclusion...

It is one conclusion of this chapter that the distinction between choreography and writing is so much to do with perceptions of the differences as with an actual radical division between the two. There, for example, a certain irony in the way the experts are giving stylistic and structural advice for writing, when she is helping students to make a dance. It is precisely considerations of style and structure that she brings to their attention. Whereas choreography is concerned as a process of realizing and transforming ideas through the medium of dance, the preference for writing is as a kind of commentary, giving (reporting) an idea of 'how they felt' and 'how they reacted', the text, the metaphor, the description. However, only so far as it helps students understand what making an essay involves, other more elusive registries govern success. The essay titles students were asked to respond to in choreography provide clues – though no more than clues – to embedded academic rules and rationales. These titles had been set not by the choreography tutor but by the pedagogy, and in each case they ask us to consider their own work in relation to the work of others. The title that most of our sample chose was:

Describe and discuss how you used particular movement vocabulary and movement quality to realize your dance idea. How did you change and develop your dance language and how best did it serve your source idea? Illustrate your answers to this question from known work.

The title, along with several of the students, found the final part of this particularly baffling – what had the work of others to do with the work of the individual student choreographer? One of the students in the study, Hannah, remarked about her predicament:

I think I captured more of what the dance was about. But because I had to write about two other people as well, I think it was quite a heavy thing for me...I think I was really having a lot of trouble focusing on my dance. This is my dance and I was talking about two other completely different people who have nothing to do with my piece. They didn't have any ideas from them, I didn't use their themes or anything. I felt it detracted from my idea. It felt as though it was three pieces in the end.
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construction of dance – ‘select, arrange, rearrange, organise, recognise, combine, recombine’ – are these things that ‘all artists do’ (spotted in Heath 1983). But the analogy with academic (or any) writing was also spontaneously recognised: ‘That’s just like an essay structure!’

Parallels with the process of making dance were drawn out whenever the opportunity arose. For example, when a student was unsure about what constituted a transition in writing she was asked to explain what a transition was in choreography. Could anyone dance a ‘transition’? One student did, another disagreed and showed her own version. Again someone disagreed. This diálogo about the meaning of a transition in dance seemed a promising way to explicitly connect corresponding concepts – and, as Laban’s comment suggests, terminology is often part of the problem. It appeared to students that in writing, as in dance, the maker has certain options available and that these are open to discussion.

A rather more stable feature of the module that seemed to contribute to exploring the correspondences between writing and choreographing was the seminar in which much of the work took place – the students’ own dance studio rather than any more formal academic setting. Here the students could be themselves in their dancer-personae, freewriting, stretching, lying down or sitting cross-legged in an atmosphere that seemed warm, light and welcoming. Timers, too, were required to follow the studio rules and to remove their shoes. From the written reflections that were a part of the module requirements, it is clear that some students felt surprised at this kind of informality in an ostensibly ‘academic’ module, but their reaction was appreciative:

The space in the gym was much better than the lecture theatre and it was noticeable as far as concentration/energy levels were concerned.

Reflections: limitations and possibilities

Students’ reactions were generally of this positive kind. Nonetheless, there were some limitations to these experiments in making, in part due to the context in which they took place. When a group of the students who had taken the module in their first year were interviewed in the final year of their course, their wide-ranging remarks included a number of recommendations. These students, it should be noted, could be assumed to be fairly confident writers since they had been in the final year for a theatrical module with a considerable writing component.

The students felt strongly that the practical module came too early, before they had been able to deal with the overwhelming experience of being in a new and confusing situation, and, not surprisingly, before they had any sense of why they might have any need for this material. Help with thinking about their writing should happen when the writing was happening, so that needs and support could coincide.

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Figure 5.1 Personal identity project (after Harre 1985)

Legitimating through writing

So much for the personal identity project of making a dance and becoming a choreographer; within the higher education context, publication and choreographing processes are only partly achieved through making in the art form itself. Over and above this, the writing of an essay functions to legitimise the work of many of the students within the conventions of the academic, largely text-based, institution. Another function of academic writing is to demonstrate, or at least argue for, the nature of something (a research proposal, a philosophical idea, a dance), where ‘necessity’ is understood, as Harre’s model suggests, not as a ‘brute new’ or out of the blue (theorisations and Geiger 1988: 288) but as arising from orientation to, and distinctiveness from, some established knowledge, stock, or system. Geiger notes that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalised reality) and transparency (explication of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing, what Olson (1977) refers to as the ‘expository technique’. Kastler and Geiger (1985: 293) comment that in Western academic contexts ‘as a means of exploration must be constrained through the process of writing’. Such a writing system marks a claim on behalf of the exploration system (which in this case is the choreography). It
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engage in discussion about why they are being asked to write and how this would involve the part of the student a preparedness to be theoretical and, possibly, political with that to talk about writing on a broad level. Our discussion in this chapter of the ‘personal identity project’, of notes and of argument in relation to the choreography essay may provide suggestions for how such talk might be focused.

Finally, all the above points come together in an expressed desire for subject-specific tutors that, for support against any shape of students’ own dis-
disciplinary study. Although many students do value the freedoms from judg-
ment that having language tutors from other disciplines brings, there is clearly a need to engage subject tutors in subject development which encourages thinking about what writing involves. Such tutors need to be able to convey their understanding confidently to students so that students may also feel confident or at least clearer about what they are asked to do. In dance, such discussion could usefully involve consideration of correspondences between writing and choreography. It should also involve reflection upon the educational, personal and epistemological purposes of writing (see Lea and Street, Chapter 2), and the different modes – for example, argument – that students might, directly or indirectly, be asked to employ.

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dents were required to hand in their essays before their dancers had reached completion. Hardly expressed the inappropriateness of this situation when he con-
cluded that before the dance is finished ‘you haven’t got much to go on apart from what you wrote and what you saw’.

3. This has similarities with that proposed by Heath (1985) in her analysis of the approach that children who have been told bedtime stories seem to use (explain, break down into small bits, note narrative features and recollect) is negligible in this age group. These approaches, she claims, lead to easy adaptation to ease/students’ readiness to ask questions, take notes, discuss various points of view, write descriptive prose, rework and feedback.

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5. Phyllis Creme

In there a place and space for the expression of the personal, and it is rel-levant to their education? Hall’s (1967) study was referred to in the present chapter and combined in the study and writing of academic disciplines by students and tutors? These are important questions for students trying to find their own sense of identity in their studies, in higher education, as well as for their tutors who may have various and sometimes conflicting models of their task as teachers. This chapter I compare the different meanings attached to the notion of the ‘personal’ in the context of learning journals used in a diary writer and ‘learning logs’, which are increasingly used in a wide range of courses in higher education. They are written on a regular, ongoing basis, and focus upon the students’ process of learning and their own relationship to the course material. Their use in higher education brings to the fore the complex issues of the meanings and uses of the personal in student academic writing.

The problematic nature of an apparently rather innocuous suggestion to students to make use of their personal position was thrown up by our work in an action research project on the uses of ‘new forms of student writing’ that were introduced alongside traditional essays in courses taught by social psychology faculty at Sussex University. The research was funded by a U.K. Higher Education Funding Council ‘Teaching and Learning Development’ project administered by the National Network for Teaching and Learning in Psychology in 1997-98. The study was designed to look at the impact on student learning of the new forms of writing, all of which may be defined as some kind of learning journal, although they differed from course to course in important ways. The two courses that I discuss in the chapter are: an upper-year, core political psychology course and an optional first-year, interdisciplinary critical reading course, on the topic of death. The death course included writing in groups in which it was designed and taught by a member of the social psychology subject group who was based in the School of Cultural and Community Studies, at Sussex, the
The research
Taking an "academic literacies" approach, informed, for example, by research carried out by Lea and Street (Chapter 2), I aimed to place the students' writing in the context of the pedagogical and institutional setting in which it was produced. From the start, therefore, I was looking at the purposes and rationale for the introduction of the journals and how they were used, the context in which they were written, and the epistemological assumptions about their courses, and their aims to the students, and their role in the teaching and learning process. Research methods included semi-structured interviews and the use of a number of normative, interviewers' log, semi-structured interviews, and had many informants. In turn, the students, both individually and in groups, on their experiences and views of anthropological, of their courses, and of different forms of writing.

Benefits of the use of learning journals
The research indicated that writing learning journals had the potential to significantly enhance the depth and range of students learning, in different ways according to their purposes within their respective courses. However, the extent to which this potential was realized in practice varied considerably – not only for individual students, but also to the extent to which they were intended into the course teaching, learning and assessment processes. Here, I draw on some generalizations drawn from the research data which I believe are relevant for future practice.

First, journals gave students an opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing. It is a theme of this book that writing is a major means by which students construct their disciplinary knowledge. The idea that writing discursively, regularly and at length helps to develop student understanding and build up a conceptual base recalls Peter Elbow's (1981) work on "free writing": getting students to write "without stopping" as a way of "moving up the writing process" has been proved effective in a number of teaching situations. Students' comments are often to their surprise – for many years. Writing learning journals is not necessarily about "free writing"; it is more about particular writing rather than as a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge. As a more important aspect of the journals was to "make the process of learning visible" both to the students themselves and to those reading and assessing them.

Second, writing journals enabled students to construct a map of the complex structures and relationships in a course or range of material. One of the reasons that writers gave for introducing learning journals was that they asked students to "make connections" between ideas within the course and also, more generally, to read this as a way of making sense of students' understanding and about their writing. Discursive writing is often more effective than, for example, seminar discussion because it is a cumulative and progressive process of meaning-making that produces a stable, substantial record which can be revised and, if appropriate, published. Regular writing, therefore, enables the students to construct connections and patterns that cannot be formulated in any other form, such as talk or memory. It allows the students to become their own readers of work in progress. It is important to trace the development in their learning from an outsider's perspective. Third, writing journals encouraged students to think reflectively. Research into academic writing genres shows that prescribed forms of writing are largely based on a combination of descriptive knowledge and how they determine the genre of thinking about a subject. As Barthes (1988: 110) puts it: "The problem of choosing which words to put on a page looks toward a world rather than toward to a contained technology." No, and for the students I worked with, the front line of their 'whole world' was represented as a functionless as a whole with no context of writing, as a way of realizing the extent of all the elements of what they were learning, and how they were structured. In contrast, what an essay 'contains' includes: structure, factual evidence, background, a specific introduction, an evaluation, references and bibliography. The essay needs to have a "cultural flow" which 'takes the argument from point to point'. The introduction needs to act as a signpost to the reader. In the end the essay is about "writing in".
and is their own autobiographies, new forms of writing enable students to make new kind of connections between their lives, the course, the text, and the wider social and cultural contexts... This reflection should include both the students' own autobiographical voices (for these are multiple) and the voices that students write at the same time, as a way of facilitating the development of the identity of the authorial self. Another way of putting this is that offering different forms of writing expands the range of the discursive forms that students can access, and that the more personal discourse of the journal can be a means of transformation to the adoption of the new autobiographical self involved in being a university student.

**Different courses, different journals**

These issues surrounding the diverse meanings of the personal in the new forms of writing emerge in a focused way in my study of the two courses on political anthropology and death. I do not want to suggest too gross a difference between the aims of the new writing on the two courses, for they had much in common in their interest in engaging students with the material. Nevertheless, the differences were marked and had important effects on the students' writing.

The 'writing on' the two courses had different titles that rather neatly reflected their different purposes as the tutors saw them: the *Journal of Studied and the Death Journal*. The former was a more explicitly political course which was aimed at introducing students to academic practices which also involved a shift in the tutors' conceptual position. Making use of the 'personal' in autobiographical writing had different meanings according to the different values and epistemological frameworks of the discipline-specific and the interdisciplinary course. To some extent — as a course taught by a social anthropologist these differences were more apparent to him than to the students as his talks to the class revealed. These different ideas of the 'personal' were discernible in how the two courses were presented, taught and assessed, and were clearly present both in the rubrics for each of the 'new forms of writing' and in the way in which the tutors discussed them, as I consider later. The *Journal of Studied* was seen as a way of using the personal to develop students' anthropological understandings, the *Death Journal*, within the interdisciplinary course, gave more scope for exploring the personal — the student's 'autobiographical self' — in its own right.
students to 'read across a range of texts' from different disciplines. In the 'Handbook' the courses are described as:

- programmes which compare the approaches of different disciplines to particular topics or problems.
- The course aims to introduce students to a range of themes central to the School... it seeks to understand
- the individual's place in society through modes of imagination and comprehension of the social sciences, literature and the arts.

The rubric for the Death Journal unit:

- The purpose of the journal is to provide a space where students can:
- record and reflect on representations and explorations of death...
- in various forms of the popular media... literature... art work (a "scribblo" format was suggested).
- consider contemporary issues surrounding death and their own thoughts on this.
- reflect on 'personal' encounters with death or dying.
- report on assigned readings.
- 'read across' texts... make links between different readings on the course.
- The journal's shape, content and style will vary a great deal depending on the author and I hope that students will make it their own.

The use of the first person here may be a signal of the writer's/teacher's approach. She referred a number of times in the seminars to her belief in the need for a writer (in this case a research anthropologist) to acknowledge her own subjectivity and her own presence in a research project. At the same time, her position was also a 'critical' and 'scholarly' one. In a conversation, she elaborated on what she hoped students would get from the course and particularly from the experience of writing their journals:

- One of the main things I'm trying to get them to do is by challenging, deconstructualising... challenge common-sense views about there being a single and tight way to do things and getting them to realise there are all kinds of ways... and see that as a necessary step to a critical perspective.
- I think them to think about the different writing genres... I try to encourage people to read beyond the individual text to get some of the context and the environment of being a scholar.

In terms of the use of the personal, she added another dimension:

- I was being surprised by the creativity of my students... I think I'm also interested in helping students find their voice. I'm trying to show that the death journals death with but does not give a sense of how integrated different aspects could be:
  - 'Friends' and relatives' deaths.
  - 'Will I continue?'
  - 'My longings for death.'

The reflection report quoted above. Throughout the death course there was a kind of 'syndrome movement' between a (disciplinary) anthropologist and an interdisciplinary student, and between a focus on what might be perceived as 'scholarly' and 'personal' experience. However, this was in a context of counteracting various foci that opened up discussions of other perspectives - the children's books, which included fiction and psychology, and the encouragement to think about 'personal' experience, enabled different approaches to be introduced. Here are some quotations from students about their reactions to the course and to writing the journal:

It helped me to feel that what I think is legitimate.Now I will be more confident about putting my own opinion into my essay.

The journals are exercises – you work outwards from one idea. In an essay you have to select, while does.

I had never thought much about death but one time I had an experience and realised how lonely death would be.

It was nice to have an opportunity for self-expression in this setting. It was like having a conversation with myself.

The tutor expressed her pleasure that students felt 'comfortable' with being able to talk and write about experiences - in this case about a premortem of death and life after death - that were not part of their personal framework, that she would not have introduced herself, and that would not have appeared in any anthropological course.

The relatively free-flowing structure of the seminars was reflected in and consistent with the requirements of the journals, which allowed students to make an opportunity to make choices about content and to make connections between the texts read, the representation of death in the public domain and their personal experience. The notion of 'understanding' became a more integrated matter than is often the case in higher education, one that neither sold out the personal nor allowed it to dominate. Personal thinking and experiences were seen as valid in the academic setting - not just as a means to a different 'academic' kind of understanding, but in their own right, to be articulated, refined and developed in ways that the writer herself decided.

The following indicates the range of terms the death journals death with but does not give a sense of how integrated different aspects could be:

- 'Friends' and relatives' deaths.
- 'Will I continue?'
- 'My longings for death.'
impression of being able to express the personal remained for them, and it was frequently validated by a strong authorial voice in their journals. The death journals explicitly invited aspects of the student’s own experience to be brought into as a “legitimate” part of the teaching and learning setting. Since death is, as the rhetoric for the course put it, a “universal experience”, it was a topic that everyone could, if they wished, engage with and relate to. One student expressed her belief that “everyone who chose this course has a story to tell”. For this student – and it was true to a greater or lesser extent of many of the students on the course – the death journal was a place for telling these personal stories in a context that attempted to integrate the personal and the academic approach.

Directions

I am suggesting that the careful use of learning journals can offer a rather liberating opportunity for students to chart their own route through their studies in higher education. The records of study and the death journals were different from each other because their contents were different, but they also had elements in common. By giving greater scope for the personal in the academic setting they allowed student writers to incorporate into their university writing ways of knowing that are usually absent from it, and opened up a different kind of space for their engagement with the course. By inviting students’ autobiographical selves to appear centrally on the academic stage, the journals offered a way of fostering the development of a confident authorial self that claims the right to write as a university student. By asking students to write differently, the journals allowed them to think differently. In this way new forms of writing have a potential not only for enhancing student learning but also for expanding teacher and student perceptions of the boundaries of higher education. There are many courses for which learning journals would be useful. However, the different uses of the idea of the personal in the two courses I have looked at demonstrate how the introduction of learning journals needs to be thought through as carefully as any other curriculum innovation within any particular course. Among the issues to be considered are the following:

- How do the journals fit with the epistemological assumptions and purposes of the course?
- How will they be integrated into the teaching, learning and assessment processes?
- How much freedom do the journals allow students in practice to negotiate their own relationship to the course?

It will be important to enable students to use the journals flexibly for their own purposes in relation to the course and to give both themselves and their readers the opportunity for enjoying their range and diversity. As the tutor on the death course put it: ‘I like being surprised by the creativity of my students’.

Acknowledgements

I should like to acknowledge the help of Sussex University social anthropology tutors, particularly Jane Cowan, Jon Mitchell, Jeff Penn, Alexander Schnurberg, Richard Wilson and Jon Whitehead, and of the students who took part in the ‘New Forms of Student Writing’ project. The views expressed here, and any shortcomings, are my own.
Writing in Postgraduate Teacher Training: A Question of Identity

Mary Scott

There are a number of professions in which entitlement to practise may depend on the acquisition of a vocationally oriented postgraduate qualification. Schoolteaching provides an obvious example, and initial teacher training at the postgraduate level is the immediate context within which student teachers are naturally considering this question. To be more specific, the writing to which I shall be referring was produced by students on the one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. As the survey of postgraduates indicates, the students already hold degrees of relevance to the subjects they wished to teach in the secondary school.

However, while the particularities of postgraduate teacher training are my primary focus, I would hope that they do not represent the limits of this chapter's relevance. In fact, I would suggest that teacher training can provide illustrations of wider issues and controversies which are likely to be pertinent in one form or another to any postgraduate course which includes time spent both in the university and in the 'real world' of a profession—a profession which man also encompasses, to some extent, those undergraduate courses which are both in and outside institutions of higher education.

The field of education is characterized by a 'web' of dichotomies—dichotomies that apply equally to law, literature, nursing and business administration, to give but four examples. The metaphor of a web has a further usefulness, too; it suggests a generative centre. In this paper that location and function is given to 'theory' and 'practice' which are viewed as the dichotomy from whose substance other dichotomies are spun.

Popular discourse offers many examples of the antithetical evaluations which 'theory' and 'practice' currently tend to generate—the 'naive and the 'sophisticated'; the 'bookish' and the 'practical'; 'Theory is learning by doing' in the 'real world' is not infrequently associated with high standards, while theory is regarded as remote from the 'real' and thus as falling through relevance to prepare learners for their future roles and tasks. In this way the perception of higher education institutions as far removed from the concerns of the 'real world' is remittent in form which denies at least some of their creative power from that despicably cultural myth of the 'ivory tower' in which reflection is held to be a noblesse and inadequate substitute for the concrete immediacy of action.

Politicians in the UK have criticized educational theory along these lines for some time. As early as 1983, for example, Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, referred to 'jargon-saturated theorizing' (Joseph 1983). Such attacks became more vehement in the early 1990s, culminating in the statutory requirement that schools play a greater role in the training of teachers. Thus it is that schools are now linked to training institutions in formal partnerships arrangement whereby student teachers spend two-thirds of their time in the partnership schools. The partnerships vary considerably in their day-to-day detail and especially with regard to the components of the PGCE course to which teachers in schools make their greatest contribution.

However, even within this new context, the preferred mode of training continues to be reflection on practice (White 1996: 174). Like most teacher trainers, Carson (1995: 151) defends this focus against its critics: 'Reflective practice does not equate with thoughtlessness that is necessary for teaching in these uncertain and changing times.' A consequence of this view is that the individual student is encouraged to think of herself as a 'reflective practitioner'. This image, which seems to confer a definite identity, is, however, highly problematic. If, as is now so often assumed, it becomes teacher education that, as Carson (1995: 151) himself has commented, it tends to be no more than an empty cliché.

The phrase 'reflective practitioner' has been abroad in the land. So much so that student teachers will roll their eyes at the mere mention of the 'R-word'. Surely it is a term that has been overused in teacher education and students are right to object to its endless and often empty repetition.

This comment matches my own observations as a novice. Consequently, in this chapter I attempt to put back into 'reflective practitioners' some of the complexity which is too often omitted out—a complexity which was being imposed upon pedagogic implementations especially in relation to student writing. To pursue that aim I shift the focus from 'reflective practitioners' to the broader issues which it encapsulates—issues of agency. In other words, I base my change of focus on the fact that the primary purpose of reflection on practice is the promotion of the trainee teacher's 'way of being' which must now be questioned, since it would reinforce certain assumptions concerning the student's subjectivity—assumptions which can be buttressed those aspects of Bennett's (1996: 56) characterization of 'competence' which identify the latter with an 'inbuilt creativity', and autonomous conception of knowledge (Bennett 1996). My challenge is to show how the two interact and how the problem of teaching helps to bring into being and, so to speak, 'in discussion, what has been edited out—any suggestion that writing does not commence even at the postgraduate level. Once we attempt to address that omission and so begin to focus on student writing as part of the process of learning we are necessarily confruent with issues relating to language. I do not, however, restrict language in this context to its lexical and grammatical form. Few of the PGCE students had difficulties of that kind. In fact most of them were fluent and experienced academic writers. My focus is rather on a student assignment as a text being shaped by the writer; in short, an example of written discussion (Bauman 1991: 2). This, I would suggest, is an approach which could address what the students themselves perceived to be their most pressing difficulty. As one of them put it:

The difficulty I had with the assignment was really not knowing what reflecting on practice would be like as a piece of writing.

In more recent years, students have been provided with detailed written guidelines intended to help them know what 'it would be like as a piece of writing'. However, as I shall demonstrate below, the new context of teacher education has created its own tensions and problems.

New context: teacher training as a partnership

When the examiners' primary criteria was an interpretative focus in which the writer developed an individual set of meanings, arts graduates, and...
object under study the literature of the field: the anticipated audience and the writer's own self. Bauman was analyzing papers by well-known academics (J.D. Watson and F.H.C. Crick, Robert K. Merton, and Geoffrey H. Hartman), who were interested in presenting new knowledge, but the difference between professional academic writers and students is actually an advantage in this treatment. It can help to break down the usual categories of students’ situations as writers. In other words, as this reference to situations indicates, I seek to avoid the Romantic view of the writer which I outlined above and associated with ‘competence’. In place of the documentary concept of an individual whose writing is regarded as the expression of diverse personal qualities or dispositions, I propose a text in which the writer is primarily visible in the connections she makes with, and between, the object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader (s).

In Bauman’s paper the four contexts both impose a coherence on the three examples of academic discourse which he discusses, and simultaneously bring up differences in the shaping of the three texts. The ‘object under study’ – the structure of DNA, the Baldwinism of scientists, and Wordsworth’s later poetry as expressions of modernity – are represented in terms of their modularity: DNA is an object that exists in the world, the Baldwinism of science is a structure that is the result of research and the later poetry of Wordsworth is the product of an individual’s creative activity. The object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader are all visible in these contexts. The use of the literature of the field and the role of the anticipated audience (in this case the writer’s peers) are clearly visible in each of these contexts. In each case the writer is mainly visible in the connections she makes with, and between, the object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader (s).

At this point a return to Bauman’s paper can serve to highlight the problematic and demanding nature of the beginning teacher’s task as an assignment writer. Bauman’s acumen rests on the success of his book which defined in relation to procedures and knowledge in their well-established fields. The beginning teacher, on the other hand, has to create the object of study within the demands and expectations of the higher education institutions and the school. The implications of this dual situation are more clearly traceable within A’s assignment when her use of the literature of the field is brought into focus. It is clear that she finds her discipline’s perspective – a perspective which matches Bauman’s description of ‘competence’. This is evident in the assignment’s full and concise summaries of the emphasis which is placed on the wholeness of the object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader (s).
Taking the experience which the learners bring to their learning and by helping them to make links between that experience and the new knowledge which the teacher is introducing.

Beginning teacher A has resources with considerable authority. This is evident in her use of repertoires which she sees – ‘points out’, ‘show and demonstrate’ – and in her use of generalizations that appeal to accepted wisdom.

For example:

The importance of providing opportunities for pupils to continue to develop literacy skills in their first languages is now well accepted.

Furthermore, the authority she gives to her sources is innately located in the authors themselves. Thus sentences like the following which begin with a personal subject are the most frequent form of reference: "John Wright shows..." (Wright points to...), "Marvin Williams and Robert L. Burden... identify: "Torbe explains." In short, the authority to whom A refers are treated as mentors offering insights which she feels she needs to be able to translate directly into practice. Consequently, ideas are not treated as ideas to be set against other ideas in the development of an argument or a personal philosophy of education. She has found a philosophy ready-made in what she has read, and she implicitly assigns the teacher's agency in the classroom to these authoritative interpretations of philosophy into a recipe for practice. However, that practice is located in a school where the national curriculum and national assessment have introduced a different discourse – a performance-oriented discourse. This has implications for A's realization in her text of the other two concerns which Baerumac proposes – the anticipated audience and the writer's own self.

The sense of audience which the assignment suggests is further evidence of her emphasis on personal meaning-making which she sees as defining the teacher as an agent in the classroom. In that she reformulates her own experience in the light of her reading and acknowledges her needs and interests, the assignment takes on some of the qualities of a personal narrative or diary of the reader for herself perhaps more than for others. For example:

"I wanted to know more about language and learning..." I now realize that it is so much easier to lose track of names of fiction any need in the way that a number of cultural identities are constructed. I remain nonetheless that there are many ways of doing this which do not involve academic text and inquiry.

Beginning teacher A is, of course, also writing for the examiners and the teacher in the partnership school. However, it is clear that she expresses a sympathetic audience since she respects their readers with the kind of self-reflection illustrated by the commendation.

Baerumac's fourth context, the writer's own self, is shown within A's text in ways that spring directly from her experience in the classroom. The primary identity which is adopted is that of a beginning teacher, and it is a identity which she finds difficult, and as the states several times. For example, she writes:

Differences targeting different abilities is about 'raising the standards of all pupils in a school not just those underachieving. It can be conceived of as within a whole school policy...' (and) is a planned process of intervention in the classroom learning of the pupil. It takes into account prior learning and the characteristics of the individual."  

(The paper talks about the need to have a balanced approach to teaching and learning, and the importance of understanding the needs of individual students.)

Conclusions

To conclude this paper, I will focus on issues in pedagogy and how they can be applied in a practical way. The critical thinking of teachers and students is essential for effective learning. Therefore, teachers should focus on creating a learning environment that encourages critical thinking and problem-solving skills. This will help students develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and improve their ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations.
A Question of Attribution: The Indeterminacy of 'Learning from Experience'

Simon Purdie

Introduction

Reading and marking seen that students have written can be a dispiriting experience. Sometimes it seems that key points of the course have not registered in the students' minds. Often the texts seem even to lack a basic knowledge of the core learning 'that surely should have been acquired long ago'. In the words of one concerned university tutor whose course I researched, and describe here, 'you can sometimes wonder what planet they are coming from'1.

Criticism of student writing, by employers and politicians, and within higher education, is all too familiar. The difficulty is that such criticism, and accompanying calls that 'something should be done', is not actually helpful either to tutors or to students in understanding the difficulties they face in moving forward. Understanding unsuccessful student writing, in a way that offers practical insight and ways forward, is one of the key challenges for writing research.

What is frustrating about researching student writing as a participant observer is the opportunity to test students' talk around their writing, and accounts of their writing. In this role, less immersed in the teaching and marking, it is possible to gain a quite different insight into the students' texts. In cases where, as the tutor, I would find their texts apparently confused and 'backing', as a researcher I have the opportunity to explore why. This is the opportunity to try to understand the origins of the unsuccessful aspects of students' work.

Like many other researchers, I often find that apparent problems in student writing do not simply represent a lack of skills, knowledge or understanding by students. Unsuccessful texts are often the result of students drawing on familiar ways of learning and writing that have served them well elsewhere, in their previous education, or in other areas of their lives. In the words of Shansley (1977) the students' unsuccessful text potentially

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Figure 8.1: Attributing an experience of academic debate

- the discipline
- the branch
- the event
- the tutor

"this is what philosophy is like" "this is what philosophers do"
"it is just like this in critics, it would be different in logic"
"you debate like this in seminar discussions, but not in writing"
"it is just the way Kate teaches - she opens up questions"

A question of attribution

Within traditional academic education

Within traditional academic education, in which there is an explicit and primary focus on learning about, there is nevertheless an important process in which the students 'learn from experience'. They learn at least some of the practices of the discipline through the activities within the course. For example, philosophy students may experience the practice of philosophical debate through the seminars they take part in. However, what they actually learn from this about philosophy (that is, about the practices of the discipline) depends on a question of attribution. I explain this in Figure 8.1.

What the students learn about philosophy from their experience of debate therefore depends on the way in which they attribute this experience. Crucially it affects whether they think they should reproduce the practices of debate within their essays, and in other courses. In other words, the absence of debate in a student's essay may not 'show' the author's lack of skill or understanding of philosophical debate. Rather, it may reflect their view or assumption that this is not required in an essay. (If debate is indeed required in an essay, students therefore need both explicit guidance that this is so, and guidance on how to debate in writing, rather than only in speech.)

Similar questions also arise within other disciplines, and particularly when students are studying in several disciplines at once. For example, sociology, philosophy, English and linguistics employ different views about what "counts" as evidence and argument. Students who manage to work out what "counts" in one course may attribute this to the particular course or to

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assigned to indicate, such an approach could accommodate attention to the particularities of linguistic choice within the competing discourses of the workplace and the university.

No matter what their precise content, such discourses tend to dichotomise theory and practice. Within the context of seminars such as I am suggesting, however, the notion of 'reflective practitioners' would fill the uneasy mix of teaching, since its complex relations to individual conceptions of agency would be visible and open to discussion. In other words, the concept would address and crystallise for themselves the issues of identity and subjectivity which would inevitably shape not only their writing but also their mode of response to the pressures and demands of learning both on and away from the job.

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the discipline, or may assume it has broader significance for all academic writing. Without guidance, they may sometimes appear to "fall to draw on what they have learned elsewhere, and at other times apply practices that were successful in one context to other contexts in which they are seen as unsuccessful.

This applies also within 'study skills' courses which prepare students for academic study. In such courses the students are often engaged in activities in groups of mixed disciplines, and the tutors are under pressure to claim that the activities and experience they provide have the kind of general relevance implied by the notion of 'skills'. There can therefore be some ambiguity in the attribution of particular activities (within, say, an 'essay' or 'seminar') to 'academia in general' or to specific disciplines and sub-disciplines.

Within science education

Within science education, the notion of 'learning by doing' or 'learning by experience' has become almost the dominant pedagogy. Students learn not only the practices of science but even the course content by 'finding things out for themselves', by doing experiments, by 'discovery'. For example, even in school, physics students may measure the gravitational pull of the earth from themselves, by conducting an experiment to measure the way an object accelerates when dropped. They learn both about the practices of experimentation in science, and about gravity.

However, this learning process involves a process of attribution. If students measure an object's acceleration to be, say, 10.2 instead of 9.8 m/s² (as it is recognized to be), they have to attribute this wrong result to their own inaccurate measurement or limited equipment and time. In other words, they have to attribute their result to the instruments in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity!

The point is that this is legitimate, and the basis for it, may never be explicitly discussed. Through recording teacher-student and student-student conversations in science classrooms (Lesh and Hoover 1987) and others show teachers caught in the difficult position of believing students should 'discover' for themselves, but also wanting them to know the 'right answer'. They show teachers attributing significance and inadequacy to the students' different measurements, guided by their own knowledge of what the result should be. They show students acquiring with judgements made by the teacher, and accepting or rejecting measurements and hypotheses, 'on no basis that is ever explained to them' (Kuchera and Mercer 1984: 124). The implication is that students learn to attribute significance and inadequacy to their measurements, often at least, to produce what is expected, (ironically, in doing so they still experiencing the intended practices of science - performing and testing observations so as to produce empirical findings that are accountable to their evidence.)

within vocational education

What is interesting about vocational or professionally oriented education is that it seems to bring together all the questions of attribution that I have described in these other contexts. The difficulty for the student, and the potential for misunderstanding and 'unacknowledged' writing, are even greater.

Typically, vocationally oriented courses aim to engage students actively in the kinds of professional practices that they need to know and understand in a future career. The familiar teaching process aims to echo the process of learning on the job, to create a situation in which students are learning by doing and 'learning from experience'. In particular, such courses engage students into actually producing the kinds of professional documents (such as reports, audits, letters) that they would produce in the workplace. In some cases this is explicitly called 'simulation'. In others is it not. Students may simply be asked to carry out, and to write, say, a financial audit or an environmental impact assessment (EIA), as if they were in a professional context.

On the one hand, this 'learning from experience' demands the same process of attribution and description for those learning 'on the job', with the same potential problems and implications. Students are involved in learning aspects of general professional practice from the experience of particular examples. They have to infer what, say, financial audits or environmental assessments are like in general (that is, the generic from the particular texts) they may have read and written. Aspects of the experience may illustrate general and repeatable practices, or they may represent merely one set of practices among many (within the profession), or a response to a particular scenario and particular professional constraints. Students' attribution of the experience is central to their developing understanding of the profession.

A question of attribution

Within science research

Attribution is also an issue for those involved in learning professional practices from their experience in the workplace. A new employee, say, dealing with procedures on the factory floor, seeking letters for the boss, or compiling a financial audit, and learning from this experience 'on the job', is involved in a process of attribution. They are involved in identifying, and the basis for it, may never be explicitly discussed. Through recording teacher-student and student-student conversations in science classrooms (Lesh and Hoover 1987) and others show teachers caught in the difficult position of believing students should 'discover' for themselves, but also wanting them to know the 'right answer'. They show teachers attributing significance and inadequacy to the students' different measurements, guided by their own knowledge of what the result should be. They show students acquiring with judgements made by the teacher, and accepting or rejecting measurements and hypotheses, 'on no basis that is ever explained to them' (Kuchera and Mercer 1984: 124). The implication is that students learn to attribute significance and inadequacy to their measurements, often at least, to produce what is expected, (ironically, in doing so they still experiencing the intended practices of science - performing and testing observations so as to produce empirical findings that are accountable to their evidence.)

Within the workplace

Attribution is also an issue for those involved in learning professional practices from their experience in the workplace. A new employee who is, say, dealing with procedures on the factory floor, seeking letters for the boss, or compiling a financial audit, and learning from this experience 'on the job', is involved in a process of attribution. They are involved in identifying, and the basis for it, may never be explicitly discussed.

Within education, this potentially problematic process is often made more difficult as the pedagogic practice of using single large course-work assignments for both learning and assessment. Students are often involved in learning professional practice from the experience of only one simulation or example activity. This is, of course, particularly problematic when professional practice are not singular or universal, but achieve subtly different functions in different settings.

On the other hand, learning from experience within vocational education poses an additional question of attribution. In parallel to the research scientists learning from a scientific expert (above), they are engaged in learning from a classroom activity that has been set up in a context removed from the professional context in which the activity actually carried out. This means that tutors and students have the potential to attribute an activity's experience to either context. They can now an experience as offering insights into the practice and experiences of the profession, by attributing the experience to 'the real world out there'. Alternatively, they can attribute it to the 'here and now', and tie the experience as being merely a consequence of doing the activity within the constraints and priorities of the educational context. I represent this in Figure 8.4.

As before, this attribution is a very fundamental process of assigning significance to an activity or experience. If the tutor or students attribute an
activity or experience to the wider profession, they will see it as significant insight and learning. If they attribute it to the 'here and now' of the course, they will see it as insignificant or irrelevant to 'real' professional practice. They will also see it as not worthy of inclusion in their professional text. This attribution is therefore central to the students' developing understanding and learning, and to their writing.

If you are familiar with vocational education you will recognize the link here to the familiar classroom talk about whether an activity is 'real' or 'not real'. In a climate in which 'academic' is often used pejoratively to mean 'removed', or even 'irrelevant', the very legitimacy of a course can be contested in terms of the links to the 'real' professional practices of the workplace. Course information and publicity often emphasize these links to this end, to construct the identity of the department, discipline and course as 'in touch' and 'relevant' to the 'real world' of employment. It also serves to attract students who are making choices within increasingly modularized degree programmes.

Even within the lectures, talk and handouts of the tutor, there are often claims that the activity is 'real' or 'not real', and that the student will be writing, say, 'a proper report', as they would do in a professional context. It is common to hear students talking to each other in these terms. They may refer to the course in different ways: as something that is a 'clinical exercise' or 'simulation'; or, as if someone had been 'taught' something. Course materials and feedback may adopt these terms of reference and the use of this language is central to the students' acquisition of professional identity.

I have come to be interested in this kind of talk, of tutors and students, because of its power in legitimating and differentiating educational activities and experience. On the one hand, it is a part of a view of education in which relevance is seen in terms of preparing students for employment. On the other hand, it is part of the fundamental process of attributing significance to experience, and learning from it. Such talk can reveal different understandings by the tutor and students, both of the course activity and of what was required of the students' texts.

Two examples of attribution

I will cite two examples from a study of an MSc course in environmental science. The research was carried out in collaboration with the tutor, who was interested in whether previous students' texts were frequently disappointing; this was despite his offering students both tutorial support and an example of a professional text. Significantly, the study was therefore an opportunity to research the issues and difficulties in learning and guiding professional writing that arise even within 'good practice'; even when the tutor is interested in writing, recognizes the kinds of demands he is making on the students, and already offers students additional support.

Example 1: Experiencing and attributing uncertainty in the scientific data

In interviews, the tutor told me that one of the key intensions of this course was: to understand the idea that in science you always have the data you want. He argued for the importance of understanding the often uncertain and provisional nature of claims that are made in science - especially within environmental science and EIA - and to use with what we teach, we definitely give students the idea that science is in itself... something which is entirely under control, which is more true than... because you only... draw conclusions which are as good as the data you've collected... and the bit of data you have tomorrow may invalidate all you've done already.

Interestingly, he did not actually tell the students this within the lectures, seminars or tutorials. Instead, he wanted them to learn about the uncertain and provisional nature of EIA from the experience of trying to do one; from the challenge of trying to understand the workings of a particular local energy from the typically limited data available, and then of trying to predict the likely environmental impacts of a future development.

His critique of most of the students' final texts was that this uncertainty their calculations were reported with certain, as a fact, and their conclusion was categorical, as the following examples demonstrate.

At High flows the concentration of sediment is so dilute that oxygen levels would remain stable, and the their effects should be considered negligible.

Then it is said that due to this being more pronounced nearer the pit with only a maximum increase of depth of 1.12 ft. (Helena)

There was no discussion of the evident uncertainties in the data and methods.

In his written assessment comments on their texts he often asks:

How do you know... and does it seem as if others have:

- a collection of assertions without any discussion.

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I say this because there is an unfortunate habit within education of attributing unsuccessful student writing first to students' lack of effort, understanding or ability, and second to the tutor's lack of expertise or 'poor explanation'. These may often be issues but, as readily available and easier 'explanations', they are used by the students to avoid recognizing the failure of teaching and learning academic and professional writing, by blaming individuals. In the short term they involve an unhelpful deignoring of the efforts and expertise of tutors and students. In the longer term they prevent real improvement in our collective professional practice and understanding, and undermine the expertise and value of education.

The challenge for researchers and educational managers is to avoid blaming individuals, to recognize and explore the difficulty for the (tutuor) of describing and explaining the kind of writing that is required of students, and the difficulty for the (students) of attempting to understand and (re)produce academic or professional texts from these accounts. The challenge is to try to understand the sources of difficulty and what can help.

In vocational education tutors are often criticized for a lack of experience in the 'real world' beyond education. In this case, the tutor was himself a practising professional in environmental impact assessment. He had considerable experience of the 'real world' of the profession. This is partly why his course was seen as increasing in terms of the experience of working. He frequently described his own professional experience, and told the students that this course activity offered them 'a real experience of EIA'. In other words, he frequently and explicitly attributed the course to the professional context.

EIA is an anger which has to be carried out under UK and EU legislation. The function of it is to investigate and predict the likely environmental impact of a proposed development, such as a road, a shopping mall or airport runway, and to communicate this to the local planning authority, the UK and it is simply called environmental assessment (EA). The course I researched involved some traditional introductory lecture input, but the focus was on students learning about EA through actually doing one, and writing one. They were given a scenario, and a copy of a provisional development proposal - in this case to extract gravel from beneath a local estate. They were also given lots of data about the estate itself, to use in their environmental assessment.

I joined the course as a participant observer. I attended and recorded the lectures, field trips, seminars, practicals and tutorials. The students were writing in teams of six, to simulate professional practice. With three permissions I joined their meetings, in which they were discussing what they were going to do, generally learning, and collaborating in producing the final text. I also interviewed both the tutor and the students during and after the course.

In the analysis I explored the apparent origins of aspects of the students' texts that the tutor had criticized in his assessment. I went back to the recordings of the student discussions, and to the moments when they discussed these particular features or aspects of their texts. I was interested in the
experience of uncertainty to the professional context, rather than the educational context. It is clear that the students needed guidance on their attribution of the experience of uncertainty. However, the tutor's response to this is that he had already given it. He had told them that the set of data they were looking at was exactly as they might find in a professional. He told them it was "real". He said, it was what the environmental impact assessors would be using if this development actually went ahead. It is therefore important to explore how these claims may be heard.

First, his assertions to the students that "this is real" can function, and can be heard, in different ways. In their discussions the students talked about whether aspects of the course were "real". They were evidently very familiar with claims from tutors that courses were "real", and regarded these quite sceptically. They saw them as part of the tutor claiming legitimacy for the course; the claims refine the assumption that the course is removed from the "reality" of professional practice. Indeed, information about vocational courses is often precisely about how they offer "real" experience. The students did not perceive the claims of this tutor to be serving any other function; they did not identify these particular claims as offering potentially useful guidance for writing the text.

Second, as the tutor had stated (above), the students conversely brought to the course an idealized view of science and professional practice. They drew on experience, the way their assessments, the way they were always given enough data to make claims with certainty. This combined with a wider belief that science necessarily achieves a certain kind of certainty, rather than also involving uncertainty and contentious claims within the process of developing knowledge. They also drew on the assumption that a "real" report would find enough data to achieve certainty (quotations above); it would not make uncertain claims from limited data. What the tutor had not anticipated was the resilience of these assumptions -- the way in which they could be sustained by a practice of discounting experience within educational context as "not real". In effect, the students' idealized assumptions could prevent them from experiencing uncertainty that they could offer. They were even able to withstand his rather explicit (and apparently accurate) examples of professional EIA in his lectures. The students saw these as examples of "what should not have happened"; they indicated neither interest nor surprise in being asked to think of a wider "reality" within the profession.

To guide students' attribution of their experience within vocational education would therefore seem to require more than an assertion that an experience is "real". It would seem to require a recognition that talk of what is "real" and "not real" is actually central to developing understanding, and it is already pervasive in the students' thinking and understanding. It would therefore seem to involve anticipating and responding to their existing patterns of attributions. It would seem necessary to address in some detail what aspects of the activity or experience we want them to recognize as insights into the professional practice.

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In this case, the tutor needed to be explicit not only that the data were real, but also that he used the so-called data and the uncertainty as real. Even if this did not challenge the students' idealised view of science or EIA, it would indicate that within this activity he was asking them to attribute the uncertainty to the professional context, and to learn to deal with this in their text. Such explicit instruction would seem necessary to get them to engage with the limitations of the available data, rather than producing the kind of report that they assume to be "real".

Example 2: Understanding an instruction/activity

In Example 1 I looked at the students' attribution of an experience, when the same consistent legitimiser, when the same consistent legitimiser this had been made very explicit. In this second example I look at their attribution of an instruction, and the difficulty students have when the tutor's own attribution was not clear. Once again I identify the implications for the students' text. This example requires some explanation of environmental assessment and the scenario. But it makes an important point, with wider significance, about the need to make explicit the rationale for a course activity within the classroom and professional contexts.

The scenario

As is typical of professional texts, environmental assessments are complex, and can have subtly different functions within different scenarios. In this course, the tutor therefore set out a scenario, and contrasted this with other scenarios they might encounter.

In this scenario (an actual case), the landowners of the banks of a local estuary had made a very provisions proposal to allow a developer to extract gravel. The proposed method of extraction had not yet been decided. The planning authority was nevertheless interested in knowing what the impacts might be. The students were to take the role of independent consultants working for the planning authority at this early stage. Their task was to inform future decisions about the development which might be extracted with minimum impact, and whether this was even possible.

The problematic instruction/activity

As consultants in this professional scenario they could, of course, assess the likely impact of every possible method of extraction. Clearly this would be a more productive use of their time to focus on the method(s) of extraction most likely to be proposed by a future developer. The tutor explained that this would be chosen, based on the option of being cheapest, or of being least environmentally damaging and most likely to gain planning permission. The act of choosing was therefore partly attributable to the professional context. However, as an exercise, the time constraints of the scenario meant that they could realistically assess only one method. The act of choosing one was therefore also attributable to the educational context.

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Figure 8.5 By attributing all constraints to the classroom context the students sustain an idealized notion of professional practice devoid of uncertainties and constraints.
The students' confusion, and the implications for their tests

Within the students' meetings, when they were trying to work out exactly what to do, the idea of choosing an extraction technique became increasingly confusing. Without a clear understanding of the rationale for this "choice" within either the classroom or professional context, it was possible for both the status of it, and the capacity in which they were taking it, to shift freely within their discussions, and finally in their tests.

The students did mean the notion that the choice of extraction methods was made prior to writing the seminar. However, in trying to understand the choice of method within the professional context, the students lost touch with the tutor's original scenario, and developed quite different professional scenarios in their minds in which they might also be producing a report with the choice already made. In particular, they shifted into an altogether possible scenario in which they had worked with a developer to choose a method, and were now presenting the method and the likely impacts of it to the planning authority.

The tutor's written comments on their test reveal the significance of this in terms of the different function of their tests. He emphasized their focus on the implications of doing it as if they were already made, rather than inquiring future decisions.

We have adopted the role of bicluster developers with only our possible scenario that of an independent arbiter whose role is to find an acceptable way for extraction, or, if this is in essence an instance of the issue already made, and if he is actually party to these decisions and actions:

Section 2: Project description

The extraction of the aggregate will be done using a class-based approach using a three-tiering method. There are three main phases: 1. The data is the project will be initialized on the north end of Block 5. . .

Once the developer has exercised a suitable policy the tests will be loaded onto a personal computer. . . . The change is that it is going to be braced . . .

The main alternative to the chosen method of a class-based developer is extraction using a center developer but this was rejected due to the following shoe-string components . . .

This contrasts with a previously successful test given to me by the tutor as an illustration of what he wanted in which the authors - as independent consultants - instead deducted the main decision that will need to be taken, the opposite "alternative", chose for the developer, and from their analysis already the key issues that will need to be addressed in this future decision about extraction methods. They therefore offer information and criteria to inform the reader in making a decision, and theymitrate the distance of an apparently independent third party.

The implications for the students' learning

Since the general function of EA is to inform decisions (both by the developer and by the planning authority), the students' own shift from this, and towards the activity of making and assessing them, represented a major loss of learning opportunity.

It is significant that making and assessing decisions is perhaps linguistically easier than seeking to inform the decisions of others. If the students were to recognize and take on the more challenging function of informing decisions, then they needed that crucial understanding of the terms of their "choice" of developer within the professional scenario. They also needed a recognition that the format and function of their text was something new and unfamiliar, which they needed to learn. It involved more than "reporting what they do" in the way that they were used to doing within lab reports. They would seem to have needed a guided look at how environmental assessment tests inform rather than assess decisions. Yet this is precisely the guided analysis of examples that is usually missing in higher education courses.

The students' reaction to the tutor's comments (quoted above) was one of common and individual. They effectively took issue with both what they thought they were doing and what they thought EA was about. Their own reactions confirm their shift into a very different scenario, and a different understanding of this text: rather than informing a project or stage, their text became part of the final submission for planning permission, in which all the decisions had been taken.

Robert: but if this is an environmental assessment . . . it shouldn't be open for discussion anyway / you should have made your decision from the alternative

Alan: is this what I did /

Robert: it's what you put in an environmental assessment / you don't go for planning permission . . . and say well I've left all these other things . . .

Alan: I thought our job was to pick which we thought was the best /

That's what I thought /

By this time, the students had sidetracked what was expected of them within a pedagogy of learning by experience; they had made sense of the activity to be developed, in an understanding of what a professional would do. The critique meant they left the course in confusion.

Problems with general claims that the activity reproduces 'real' professional practice

Clearly for the students, as they had shifted into their different scenarios, they had nevertheless been able to sustain their actions with the knowledge

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that this was what a 'real' consultant would do. There are indeed environmental assessments of the forms they produced. However, the assumption that what is 'real' must be acceptable is a dangerous one. It implicitly assumes a rather singular (as well as unrealistic) view of EA.

In retrospect, the students needed guidance on the ways in which the different scenarios within EA that they had been told about in the lectures (involving different relations between people and between documents) actually demand different EA texts. They needed to look at the ways in which, for example, environmental assessments achieve different functions within different types of texts. Only then could they consider the implications of their particular scenario for their test. Only then could they realize how their own text might actually need to be different from 'real' examples they may find or be familiar with.

Significantly, this need to focus on the diversity of practice and texts therefore offered a direct counter to the temptation in higher education to make the general claim that an activity is 'real', or reproduces 'real' professional practice. This kind of scenario (that is common in course publicity, and in tutor and student talk in vocational courses) is inadequate and potentially misleading. It involves a very general attribution that may actually encourage the students in understanding the significance of particular instructions and the ways in which they engage students to put aside the diversity of professional practice, to pursue practices that are 'real', but which were nevertheless not required, not functional and not appropriate in this particular instance.

Implications for researching student writing

I started by arguing that one of the key challenges for writing research is to understand successful student writing, in a way that offers practical insight and ways forward. I have tried to illustrate the importance of researching students' accounts of their texts, rather than simply the texts themselves, and of trying to understand the potential 'notion' behind successful aspects of their texts. This can offer practical insight into why these might have been successful, and can offer the tutor practical ways forward. I challenge the assumption that students' difficulties in writing are simply an issue of their 'skills' in writing. Instead it focuses our attention on the understandings that have guided them, and the practices they have drawn on.

In a short chapter such as this, one can only focus on a particular issue. However, it is important to recognize the origins of unsuccessful writing not to claim a single 'cause'. This is likely to have underestimated the complex and subtle demands of the writing task, and to be simply painted by the writers themselves. As I have argued elsewhere (Pardoe 1997, 1999) it is important to explore a potential network of factors that together may have enabled, or prompted, and sustained the students' unsuccessful understandings and writing. The question of attribution is likely to be an important element.

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A question of attribution

The way in which I have addressed this question of attribution has an important implication for how we view talk between tutor and student, and between students, about what is 'real' or 'realistic'. It is important to analyze the functions and the effects of these claims within the classroom, rather than simply joining in! By this I mean that it is not helpful for researchers simply to react to the claims of vocational education (that the activities are 'real') be counter-claiming that they are not 'real'. I see this as a potential danger when, for example, because (1990) argues that knowledge and practices are inevitably 'fundamentally transformed' by being 'recontextualized' into the classroom, and when, for example, Underhill, Kuklinski et al (1994) argue that student writing within professional simulations needs to be seen not as a process of bringing professional practices and texts into the classroom, but as types of texts in their own right, quite distinct from the 'real' workplace.

By assuming what is 'real' and 'unreal' themselves, their analyses miss the negotiated nature of this within the classroom. They miss the ways in which making links to professional practice beyond the classroom may involve a process of attributing significance to activities and experience, and learning from them. They miss the way in which knowledge and professional experience and activity from the 'real world' is already a performative practice, a process in which students have a high skeptical view of claims that activities in education are 'real'. And therefore they miss the need for tutors to anticipate and respond to assumptions and talk of what is 'real' as an integral part of developing shared understandings within their classroom.

Implications for tutors in higher education

I now summarize what I see as the practical implications of this research for tutors. My concern is where students are learning the general practices of a profession or discipline from particular examples and experiences provided by tutors.

First, we need not assume that the significance of an experience is self-evident. As I have shown in Figures 3.13–3.4, learning from an activity or experience in any context involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as more generally significant, and what should be regarded as more particular. Within vocational education, where an activity or experience necessarily involves links to both the educational and professional context, the process of learning also involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as offering insight into the profession, and what should be regarded as being a consequence of doing this within the classroom. In order for students to understand a particular activity or experience in this way we intend, we need to make explicit the significance that we attach to it.

Second, we need to bear in mind the common conjunction of technical and science courses with an already skeptical view of claims that an activity or an experience is 'real'. They may bring an established practice of dismissing
aspects of an activity and experience as being simply a consequence of it being within the educational context. If the observations of Edwards and Mercer (1987) and others (above) apply more widely, they may have learned from school science sometimes to dismiss their actual data or results, and report what they think 'should have happened'. If we want students to experience constraints on a professional activity (such as time, resources or accuracy) as part of their experience of professional practice or science research, then we need to make the same of that experience explicit. We may need to articulate explicitly that this is a part of the intended learning. Consequently, if they need to understand some aspects of the activity or experience as being a consequence of the educational context, then we need to make that clear, too. This does not undermine the way in which other aspects of the activity can nevertheless give important insight into professional practice. After all, the educational context provides an opportunity for developing exactly the kinds of explicit understanding that get missed in 'on-the-job' training in the workplace.

Third, as Edwards and Mercer (1987) have argued for science education, within courses where students are learning the practices of a profession from the experience provided by the course, we similarly need to be very wary of dipping into explaining an activity solely in terms of the immediate classroom procedures. This fails to give students the understanding that they need of the rationale for the activity within the profession, and/or within the course. In particular, if students are to report their activity within a professional document, in the voice of a professional, they need an explicit understanding of this activity as a part of professional practice.

Equally, as tutors, we need to be wary of the general claims (common in vocational education) that a whole activity is 'real' or 'realistic'. These simply encourage students to assume that if they have followed 'real' practices and a 'real' text, then their own text must be acceptable. Instead, we need to develop their understanding of how the task and text link to particular scenarios and sets of practices within the profession.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to make explicit for students the implications of the professional scenario for the text. This is likely to seem irrelevant to the experienced tutor, but it is exactly what needs to be learned. There are now new challenges involved in their writing, such as articulating uncertainty, informing a decision, or even using evidence and previous research to produce an argument, then students need some guidance about how this is done. They cannot simply deduce the linguistic form and strategies of a professional text from the task or from the scenario, and they cannot reinvent it from first principles. Without guidance about the new genre and how it may differ from those in their experience, students may simply reproduce old familiar practices. Without guidance about the ways in which professional texts need to differ from one scenario to another, they may feel it is acceptable to refer to any 'real' professional texts they find in an attempt to invent what they are required. To go beyond the reproduction of their existing practices, or of available examples, they need to be offered a range of chosen exemplar texts, and they need explicit guidance in seeing what is both common to these, and significantly different. Only then can they begin to understand what is demanded of their writing, and recognize and understand the subtle strategies and wordings that make texts functional in different scenarios.

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Notes
1. I am adopting the practice of using single quotation marks around a term or phrase that is not in my own words. Double quotation marks are used for actual quotations.
3. Particularly available and interesting accounts of this within sociolinguistic studies of the construction of scientific knowledge include Latour (1973; 1992) and Gilbert and Molyneux (1994).
4. Transcripts symbols used:
   Speech
   / indicates a pause or hesitation, roughly half a second per dot;
   \ indicates an apparent break between units of speech, indicated by the speaker through a change of tone or a pause;
   [ . . . ] indicates that at this point in the extract some of the original utterance has been omitted;
   [ . . . . ] indicates author's emphasis;
   [ . . . ] indicates that at this point in the extract some of the original text has been omitted.
5. The tutor's account of uncertainty in EAI drew on his experience as an environmental scientist, commonly faced with the demand to make predictions from limited data, and his knowledge of the way in which EAI are taught based on the very limited data available about a particular local area. His account would seem to be supported within the environmental assessment literature. In a key introductory text on EA, Smit and Toninello (1990: 108) summarize the situation as follows.

Part 3
Contexts of Writing and Professional Learning
Writing for Success in Higher Education
Janice McMillan

Introduction

Writing in higher education is a challenging task for many students. Such "freestanding" or "individual constructivist" acts, as identified by Rafter (1994: 19):

- norms of conversation, division, emergence, and contest. They happen at the intersection of diverse goals, values and assumptions, where social roles interact with personal images of one's self and one's situation. These are often sites of negotiation where the meanings that emerge may reflect resolution, adding contradiction, or perhaps just a temporary pause against uncertainty.

To understand learning as a 'site of negotiation' is a useful way of explaining students' experiences of writing in higher education. This is particularly so in South Africa, where many adult learners cross the formal boundary into higher education with relatively poor previous experiences of formal education or schooling. Recent literature highlights the barriers or feelings of 'disparities' facing non-traditional mature learners—once they have crossed the formal, institutional boundary (Welch 1996; Janes 1993) and have argued that there is often tension between formal institutional access, and curriculum or epistemological access.

While significant, this view neglects an important component of learning, namely the role students play in this process. The quote by Fraser above attests to this, and highlights how complex a process it can be. This chapter sets out to examine these issues from a particular perspective. While many students do struggle to cross epistemological boundaries in higher education and we need to be mindful of this, others succeed, often against all odds. In order to understand successful learning, this chapter draws on research exploring the learning and writing experiences of first-time non-traditional mature learners. The main question it examines is what the process of constructing a 'successful' learner role entails, and how this

Background and context

At UCT, certificate-based adult education provision has traditionally been non-formal. From the mid-1980s until the end of 1994, the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies offered two-year-long non-formal programmes: the Community Adult Education Programme (CAPE) and the Adult Learning in the Workplace Programme (WL). While there was substantial overlap between the two programmes, there were important distinctions in terms of student groupings. Whereas students in CAEP were predominantly community-based adult educators, Nluo- or Afrikaans-speaking and predominantly 'black' (used to denote both 'coloured' and 'Africans' apartheid racial classifications), the students on the WL were a mixture of 'Coloured' students and corporate- or industry-based trainers. There was thus a strong representation of white, English- or Afrikaans-speaking students on the WL courses over the years.

Provision on both these programmes was non-formal, access to the institution being granted on the basis of previous experience. Given that the courses lacked formal accreditation, assessment took on the same non-formal nature. Although credits were awarded to students who had a high attendance record. The aim of such courses was to provide access for the further development of practitioner competence - students thus entered with the role of practitioner firmly in place, and this was built on during the programme. They were provided with an opportunity to reflect on and further develop the skills and experience they already possessed. The notion of the 'critical reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987), explored by Elizabeth Haussler-Malcolmson in Chapter 10 of this volume, guided the thinking behind curriculum design and development and the teaching approaches adopted, allowing us to integrate learning and experience, and to facilitate critical thinking and problem-solving. In this way, increased possibilities for practitioner development and, I would argue, 'successful' learning were put in place. However, with the move to formalise the certificate course, the relationship between roles and learning became more complex.

Skills from non-formal to formal

Incorporating access to higher education as well as problems in the relationship between higher education, national reconstruction and human resource development are currently high on the agenda in South Africa. The African National Congress's (ANC) Education and Training Department (ANC 1994), on which the government White Paper (Department of Education 1994) is based, continues to focus on the need for redress, and equity. Access is thus viewed as providing equal opportunities to those who have found education inaccessible in the past.

Many providers have responded by formulating provision. UCT responded to such calls in 1995 by introducing a new formal Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development. Many of our students - mature adult educators/trainers - now entered the programme with the normal formal requirements for entry to university study. We initiated a policy of 'alternative access' and encouraged any of our students who had completed the two previous non-formal programmes to one department to apply for the new programme. This qualification, therefore, together with their experience as practitioners, provided them with formal access to the university. However, while we retained a policy of institutional access on the basis of prior experience, the course now offered formal accreditation, and formal written assessment was introduced. The course thus had a mixed aim: the further development of practitioner competence and the development of academic skills and competencies.

During 1995, while conducting the research reported here, student numbers more than doubled, from the usual 30-55 students per course to over 70. This also brought a very diverse group of practitioner students on to our course, including both community-based educators and trainers and those located within a corporate or industry setting. The latter group included some students who already possessed undergraduate and even postgraduate university qualifications. What interested me, therefore, was to investigate and explore what possible 'alternative combination of credentials' (Fairclough 1992a) students might be adopting in the process of learning in order to be successful. I wished to understand these through the students' experiences of learning and writing.

In thinking about writing and assessment on the certificate programme, we saw the need for it to serve two parallel purposes: First, given the fact that the course targeted adult education practitioners, there was a need to allow them to draw on that work experience through assessment, but also to enable them to become 'critical, reflective practitioners' (Schön 1987). While writing is by no means the only way in which this can be done, assessment is an important component of formal learning, and we attempted to incorporate assignments which would require a reflection on their own work (see Appendix 1).

Second, we understood that many of our learners had no experience of formal higher education, that we needed to allow for them in
develop 'academic literacy practices' which would hopefully enable them to 'create the discourses' (Gee 1990), or at least an important component of it. We recognized, however, the difficulties that students base with academic writing for assessment (see also Lea and Street, Chapter 2). Many students experienced learning in higher education as alienating (see also Blaikie 1992a; Flower 1994; James 1995; James 1995) also argues that many students experience challenges for the intense significance of assignments, grades, yet he argues that we often overlook the role that both assessment and lecturers play in 'legitimising' higher education studies. This emerged in students' accounts of their learning. One student interviewed, Naomi, when asked what she felt about assignments, said that she felt it was a good thing because:

you know where you stand and if you want to take it further, you know what your 'weak points are' ... it's how you can learn.

Another, Yasmine, when she did not do as well as she thought she might on a task, blamed it as lecturers:

It felt it was sort of your fault that I wrote the whole thing because you didn't make it clear to me at the end what you wanted. If I had known, I could have... sort of got 80% for it.

Understanding learning: meaning-making and negotiation in context

Learning and writing: negotiations of academic literacies

Thesen (1994), working from a sociocultural/linguistic position, looks at second language student experiences of writing at university. She argues persuasively for an approach to learning which attempts to look at 'voice or subjectivity... [constructing] meaning in the individual' (Thesen 1994: 36), yet without being the same, she contradicts this position. Thesen believes we need to ask ourselves where the thinking can be found and - between a discourse approach should be concerned with the interactions between people in a given context rather than relationships to text. This then allows for meaning to be located in the user or individual rather than the discourse. Discourse is therefore 'a process of meaning exchange, via language, in a given context. Individuals have differing access to their pat terns of exchange in different contexts' (Thesen 1994: 25). She sees this interaction as an attempt to bring together the discourses of discussion, meaning-making and the fundamental recognition that individuals do not have equal access to this process of negotiation' (Thesen 1994: 25). The importance of learning within this perspective assigns a stronger role to the individual as agent, acting sometimes from the centre, and at other times from the margins. What is important is to understand that students are continuously making decisions in their learning. In particular, she argues that:

this perspective makes it easier to track and understand the way discourse rub against one another, and what individuals do about this. Locating meaning in the individual does not mean that I am downplaying the social, but trying to find a starting point that is more profoundly social in that it deals with human action, which must surely be at the heart of the social.

(Thesen 1994: 36)

Highlighting some of these issues in relation to student writing, Flower (1994) expands on the notion of discourse and the role students play in their own learning. She points to the importance of understanding learning as 'negotiating meaning' and argues that we need to understand social cognitive processes as being a source of meaning and conflict among the many forces that act to shape meaning: the demands of the learning context as well as learners' own goals and knowledge. As a response to this tension and conflict, learners learn to the active negotiation of meaning, thereby creating meaning in the interaction of alternatives, opportunities and constraints. For Flower (1994: 14), a literal act is 'an individual constructive act... [which] can call for the organisation of diverse, seemingly irreconcilable practices... (these) reflect the complex, even contradictory, goals and purposes that often drive meaning-making'. This implies, following Clark and Beswick (1997), an understanding of the relationship between writing and social context. They argue that it is important to bear in mind the relationship between writing and context. In a particular context of situation, the content of 'culture' provides the range of possibilities which are competing for dominance. What the student brings to the task, in terms of his/her own attitudes towards it, beliefs about what is expected from the task and the purpose behinds that particular task, links to the broader context of culture and affects the process and outcomes. The context of culture therefore, affects writing practices and, in turn, the writer. Clark and Beswick argue that this can either rest or conflict with the patterns of privileging within the context of culture.

Bringing in theories of academic literacies (Bazerman 1990) further explores the conflicts and contradictions students experience as they negotiate academic knowledge in relation to the numerous worlds of work, community and home. Lea (1998) believes that 'a central part of the learning process for students is negotiated not just with the struggle between other familiar "ways of knowing" and "academic ways of knowing" but with different literacy practices that are associated with these'. In particular, she argues that adult learning often involves constraints and challenges as students incorporate new knowledge and ways of writing and reading texts with course requirements. In this process, students are both constructing new meanings and constructing new knowledge bases. In trying to understand

meaning-making often involves the construction of multiple roles and these then become visible through the practices of writing in particular contexts.

The study

My research involved working with four women students with whom I had a fair amount of contact in various contexts throughout 1995. The students share many similarities with other adult learners in South Africa: disrupted or poor schooling, impoverished backgrounds and broken family. Two are ex SEDEC students and two EDCET. In their own ways however, they are all strikingly different. Two are English speaking, one English-speaking and one Afrikaans. Their ages range from early 30's to 60's with one foot in the 'past' (as the eldest told me previously).

My data consisted of interviews, informal group discussions, observations and pieces of assessed student writing. I adopted an ethnographic case study approach in order to collect 'thick descriptions' of what was happening with some of my students. While my approach was, obviously, not a full ethnographic study in the anthropological sense of a 'totalizing and cultural' approach, I developed an approach that allowed me to incorporate culture and context as ways of understanding learning (see Thesen 1994; homeless 1993; Thesen 1994). I conducted two interviews with all four students - one which foregrounded their experiences as students in the class, while the other foregrounded their lives outside the class as adults, as practitioners and as learners. During the first interview, I focused my questions on the two aims of our course and specifically their experiences of writing assignments, working in groups and relationships with others, both learners and tutors. While my original study involved four students, for the purposes of this paper I have selected two which highlight contrasting patterns of interaction and meaning-making.

I will present each case separately as I believe this better captures the specifics of each student's particular situation. I begin with the brief biographical sketch for each. Given that I am interested in the different ways in which students construct roles and how this shapes their perceptions and experiences of writing, my analysis will focus more on their understanding of writing than on their actual writing practices.

Yasmine: 'maybe I'll quit... tomorrow'

Yasmine, aged 37, is a single (widowed) parent of two children who lives in Mitchell's Plain (formerly a 'coloured' township) with her sister and her sister's husband and their child. She says that Mitchell's Plain is divided by a railway track and that she lives on the 'wrong side' where gangsterism is rife and the unemployed sit around on the street corners.
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Having grown up in Deep River, her family was moved to Ayrshire during the height of the Garouge Area forced removals. When I asked her about the effect of political events in her life, she said that while she was not directly involved in political activities, she was made aware of them through her teachers and her family. After leaving school at the end of high school, she got married and started working in a factory, a machine operator. Nine years later she had her second child and decided she was not going back. I asked her if this was because she wanted to get involved with helping people,

no, not helping people. Helping myself... I was fed up with being a number on the factory floor.

At the time of the interview she was employed at a youth volunteer centre as a satellite branch organiser but felt that she would like to start an office where she could work on her own. Janice’s experience of learning and the ways in which she dealt with the writing demands of the course was tinged with contradictions and turmoil yet ultimately with success. Writing played a big part in helping her to work through much of this conflict – both inside and outside the course.

The primary pattern of engagement I identified in Janice’s learning experiences was that of conflict (Kasworm 1990) – she also adopted many ways to deal with her learning (Lea 1998). However, there was evidence of withdrawal and accommodation (Kasworm 1990) or reformulation (Lea 1998) in her account.Given strong linkages between her personal and learner identity, Janice’s experience demonstrated a fairly high sense of anxiety and conflict.

I wanted to give up at some stage.

Sudden and unexpected fits of conflict, often experience-life difficulties and, according to Kasworm (1990: 11), ‘they are unique in the intensity and breadth of their personal life difficulties’. In terms of the kind of learner role she saw for herself, Yasmine felt that she was:

more on the outside, I think, sort of looking in.

This seemed to be a case of the ‘echo learner’, a pattern of engagement Kasworm argues is indicative of the withdrawal pattern. This was clearly evident in her relations with other students, with the lecturers and with her processes of writing. While the role of lecturer was important in her writing, she felt that:

there’ll always be this power thing.

Yasmine spoke of the conflict between herself and the ‘professionalist’, other students on the course, whom she perceived as thinking they were superior to her because of their formal job status. It appeared that some students were ‘in the discourse’ and she was ‘outside it’. This relates to Tornhan’s comments about the different ways in which discourses ‘rub up against each

other’ and how students deal with the conflict this causes; it is highlighted in the following extract of a poem by Yasmine:

DISCOURSE

We are being told about

The roles we play

The discourse that we follow

As if we didn’t know.

There’s groups that feel they’ve been there

Others feel they’ll never get anywhere

It’s clear to them, but what about the rest of us?

I’m lost!!

Through all of this, assignments follow.

Handouts to read and books to borrow

I think I’ll quit.

Tomorrow.

It is in her writing that she seemed to find a way to express some of her anxieties and to make meaning out of her experiences. Writing plays an important role in her life even outside the classroom, and she indicated in the interviews that she finds it easier than talking. In addition, it had become an important way of working through difficult issues in her life:

If I feel strong about something, I dream it. Then I get up and write it down... I would like to write a book. Not just any book — my life story — because lots of interesting things happened in my life so I would like to put it down on paper.

However, it is not without conflict either. Given that she sees herself as a perfectionist — ‘precise makes perfect, but I’m not perfect’ — she often feels disappointed. This is both with herself and with the lecturers.

like if I did an assignment and didn’t get the marks I thought I would

get upset with myself.

What is interesting, however, is that when Yasmine wrote assignments, while she might resist writing them, she managed in some way to ‘suspend’ the inner turmoil and anxiety that often felt. On the course of her Assignment 4 (see Appendix 2), she indicated that:

I nearly didn’t write this assignment because it dealt with politics (it was concerned with the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a key piece of legislation aimed at addressing socioeconomic transformation and reform). Her assignment however, was built, well argued and a coherent piece of writing for which she received a high mark. She was able to discuss the views of others towards the RDP together with her own. In addition, she was able to do this in a way which did not allow the ambiguity she expresses towards the topic initially. There is thus a third

pattern that emerges in this account, namely accommodation (Kasworm 1990). While she adopts a stance of challenge to the course demands and finds the primary pattern of engagement I identified in ‘student material’ gives the course – and writing in particular – authority for her in shaping her experiences.

While I argue that withdrawal was also demonstrated by Yasmine in her account of her learning experience, particularly in her experience of assessment, this did not totally obscure her success. In other words, while Yasmine’s experience was difficult and often tinged with turmoil and conflict, she found ways to negotiate meaning – she saw herself as being able to rise above this conflict. This was particularly through writing on the course. Her pieces were hard work and very little, if any, of the turmoil she spoke about in her learning comes through in her writing. So in some ways, her writing exhibited a reformulation approach while at times she grappled with a challenge approach towards her learning (Lea 1998).

Nomi: the multiple roles we play

Nomi, aged 48, is a single mother of three children. She grew up in Cape Town. As one of 11 children, she describes her life as very ‘in and out’, something she tells is repeated in her difficult family relations. Her ‘in and out’ identity also relates to periods spent in both the rural and urban areas, separated from her mother and brought up by her grandmother. She sees this as an important part of her identity and experiences; she sees herself as both urban and rural — these identities are balanced for her and help her work with people from different communities.

You must be careful how you work with rural women otherwise they won’t come to you. You must be flexible.

This issue of ‘flexibility’ is important for Nomi and something which brings into her learning on the course. Nomi currently works as a sewing trainer for a large non-governmental organisation. While she loves her job and working with people, she feels she is not very good at doing things for her community she should not create dependency.

you should teach her how to make food, not give her food.

For Nomi, an important issue on the certificate course was being able to reflect critically on what she was learning. This was important for her as she felt that she could transfer what she had learnt back to her work and experiences in life. She felt that independence was important — the course presented a place where it was expected of her to:

think, do your own things.

While she enjoyed the diversity in the class, she often felt that group discussions were uninspiring. This emphasis on group work, an important

part of the course and strong feature of the discourse of much adult and experiential learning, was something that was contrary to her preferred learning setting.

When asked if she felt she was coping with the demands of the course, this interviewee was evident:

ya, I think I am into that... although I might not be... I would put myself in writing, group discussion and reading but... I don’t contribute much in class discussion. I contribute only in writing.

Nomi’s processes of meaning-making and negotiation had, therefore, to take place largely outside the social setting of group learning and within her own writing. However, it was not all negative for her. While she found talking in groups difficult, she absorbed their ideas and often found an answer to her own question — she learnt to use the group processes to her advantage and overcome a potential barrier to learning. It is in the moments of recalling her past experiences — work and life more broadly — that learning really had meaning for her and, I would argue, she used this to negotiate success in her own assessed writing.

According to Kasworm (1990), the primary pattern of interaction is that of transformation and this is the most integrated and yet complex pattern of engagement. Students engaging in this way are uniquely positioned to draw on the multidisciplinary nature of higher education and the undergraduate learning process; they speak to a prominent, definitive perspective of their own internal value of learning, their involvement across their life work in learning, and their commitment to learning as a broadening of values, perspectives, and belief. Elements of this pattern were strongly visible in Nomi’s account. For her, the importance of the relationship between her identity as an adult and community worker, on the one hand, and that of learner, on the other, meant that she constantly made reference to the role that the course played in her own practice, as well as the role that her world of practice played in her learning. Nomi also showed a high degree of critical reflection on herself as a learner and on how learning related to work and life. As a student, she thus had clear expectations of herself. While she valued lecturers as mediators, she also saw herself and her life experience as important in guiding her learning.

The notion of ‘self-reflection’ was also present when Nomi spoke of her assessed writing. She acknowledged that such writing is about argument and that:

you don’t write something like a story.

You must argue... you say what you want to say and then you reflect it in the outline and look at it on the other side... you must reflect on your everyday life, your own experience.

However, it is also important for Nomi in her writing to reflect on past experience and to express her opinions...
may be there an argument which you must reflect on from what you are reading. You say, I agree with this but in one way, I disagree. You reflect again - as if you are talking to someone else. I then repeat it to myself until I can hear it - it must make sense to me before I can write it.

These feelings about the importance of reflecting on her own experience were brought into her writing of Assignment 4. Unlike the other three students, she chose the first of the two choices (4A), mainly because I wanted to say what I think of RDP, not what other people think. It's where I could express myself about what's happened and what must be changed - to redeem the past.

A secondary pattern that also emerges in her account is the idea of accommodation. While she felt that 'life experience taught you a lot', she did not view the university as having value and the usefulness of the curriculums and transmission processes, most in her account of the importance of written assessment, as telling you 'right from wrong'.

In many ways, Notni exhibited many of the attributes of a 'critical reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987), in that her role as a practitioner was continually under personal scrutiny. The way she engaged with her learning through her experiences outside the class, what she was learning - was highly indicative of this.

I learnt to think deeply and also to add to my experience about how this happened the previous time... more explicitly, I have worked out how to do the right things.

Her assignment reflected this strongly. She comments,

My general knowledge of apartheid laws during the years has given me a sense of what has changed and what has not. This assignment will be based on community understanding and [and] needs and what impact the RDP principles would have on the community.

For Notni, therefore, success on the certificate was made possible by a complex process of self-reflection and making meaning through writing for assessment. The context of the course allowed her to build on her previous experiences, but she felt that she had to actively link her learning on the course with her outside world(s). She also showed flexibility in her learning, so that when at times she might have felt on the margins of the course (for example, in group work), she was actively engaged in the process of border crossing and making meaning for herself as a learner (McMillan 1998). This emerges particularly in her strong feelings about the need for critical reflection, as well as in her belief of the importance of argument in the process of writing assignments.

The practices of writing were experienced differently by the students for Notni, on the whole, they seemed more positive experiences than for

Yamine, however, what emerges clearly is that each of them found ways to take action and exhibit agency in their learning which allowed them to successfully negotiate potential boundaries to accessing the discourse.

Conclusion

In exploring these two students' experiences of learning and writing, I have argued that the ways in which learner roles are constructed and the context within which learning takes place are crucial to understanding success. Success in turn needs to be understood as a process of boundary negotiation and meaning construction. For Yamine, this was through her writing, finding a way to deal with her personal feelings in ways which did not obstruct her learning on the course; for Notni, this was in being able to reflect critically on both her life and student experience, integrating both. While this is a unique process for different learners, it is at the intersection of the individual and the social and through the construction of learner roles that meaning is made and success attained (McMillan 1997).

However, if we acknowledge that learning context involves specific discourse communities, and that both life-world and learning experiences impact on opportunities for success, it is clear that success in one context will not necessarily guarantee success across a range of other learning contexts. A key issue, therefore, for further research is assessment and the role such practices play in shaping learning experiences across contexts, particularly if we are serious about widening opportunities for students to access a range of higher education contexts.

We need to be mindful of the 'signals' that are given out through curricula and pedagogical practices, particularly through assessment tasks. These are the clues that students use in their attempts to engage with otherwise unfamiliar academic literacy practices. Furthermore, if we wish to make 'challenge' and not just 'reformulation' approaches (Lea 1998) a reality in higher education as a way of fostering the development of new voices and identities among our students, our approaches to curriculum and pedagogy need to make explicit opportunities for this. So, too, do our assessment tasks and the ways in which we judge student writing. Neglecting to do this could see students up for failure; or at the very least, feelings of disjuncture (Well 1986) which could lead to disappointment and even possible withdrawal from higher education.

Note

1. DEG and DET are the abbreviations under which the education departments of the apartheid era were known. DEG was the Department of Education and Culture for 'coloured' students; DET was the Department of Education and Training for 'African/black' students.
Appendix 2: Cover sheet for Assignment 4 of the Certificate Programme

**CERTIFICATE IN ADULT EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTESTUAL STUDIES (EM105SW)**

**ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

Name: 
Student Number: 

**ASSIGNMENT NO. & TITLE**

Date: 

Please answer the following two questions in as much detail as possible:

1. To help you establish your own patterns of learning, reflect and describe the process you followed to complete this assignment. This could include an estimate of the time it took, what you read, how many drafts you did and the order that you followed.

2. How successfully do you think you have dealt with this assignment? Give reasons for your answer.

**ASSESSOR’S COMMENTS:**

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Elizabeth Howey-Maidment

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From Personal Experience to Reflective Practitioner: Academic Literacies and Professional Education

Elizabeth Howey-Maidment

**Introduction**

Professional education is an expanding area of university work. As professionals such as nurses, pharmacists and social workers are accorded higher status, courses are being fundamentally restructured and there is a growing literature on the nature of professional education (Birks and Winter 1982; Earn 1994). Most of this literature focuses on the development of professional competence and academic understanding, and how this is achieved through a combination of traditional academic learning and experiential learning gained in the workplace. Areas of interest include the role of mentors, the relation between competence-based outcomes and academic learning, and examining the ways underlying academic disciplines such as biological or social sciences are presented within courses and professional frameworks.

The role of academic literacies in professional education has not been addressed in the same detail as these broader issues. They are important, however, not just because of the written nature of much professional education, but more particularly because so much assessment in the university system requires students to write. Some disciplines—for example, medicine—minimize the role of written assessment by using systems based on multiple-choice questions, oral examinations and practicals, but many professional programmes use assessment strategies based on those associated with underlying academic disciplines. The social sciences, for example, are core to a range of professional courses including nursing, teaching, social work and management. Social sciences are traditionally assessed through essays, experimental and project work presented in report form, and by means written examinations. When these disciplines are taught within professional courses, certain linguistic patterns and forms which serve to identify pieces of writing as ‘academic’ regardless of the subject. Although some of these rules are breaking down, academic English is generally marked by an impersonal style caused by the use of abstract nouns, passive verbs and a tendency to avoid the use of pronouns such as ‘I’ or ‘we’ which identify the writer. It is also common for sentences to have grammatically simple forms which include large numbers of nouns and adjectives whose main function is to make meaning more precise. Students are frequently ‘trained’ to write in a way which is alien to those working in a range of organisational settings, which are characterised by a variety of spoken, informal contexts where the conventional academic is not required.

In addition to these grammatical features, academic writing adopts easily recognisable forms. These range from academic papers and books aimed at highly knowledgeable members of the academic community to apprentice pieces such as essays written by undergraduates. Pieces of writing which share both forms and linguistic features are described as ‘genres’ by some linguists, with different forms of academic writing such as essays, papers and reports of different kinds referred to as ‘subgenres’. Whereas students are not expected to have the same grasp of the concepts and theories they are writing about (Biber 1988), student writing is still recognisable as academic writing and is unlikely to be confused with vocational writing which may include, in particular, more familiar language because of their previous professional training and experience.

Accordingly, students are generally expected to learn these things linguistically: the language of the subject or subjects they are studying; the rules and conventions used by individual disciplines; and the more general features of academic writing which make it instantly recognisable. As apprentices, students learn the language of subjects they are studying as an integral part of learning its concepts and theories, but they also undergo more general socialisation into writing in an academic way. They are frequently expected to learn the general conventions of student writing very quickly on the assumption that they have already begun this process at school. But many students on professional courses are largely following vocational rather than academic paths on leaving school and consequently find it difficult to grasp the importance of conventions such as the organisation of essays into introduction, body and conclusion, the use of sections with headings in scientific reports, and the rules followed by different disciplines for citing references and attributing quotations. A good example of this is the frequent complaint from lecturers that students fail to give reference lists. This problem is not so common that we must ask why it occurs. It would appear that students fail to pick up the functions of a reference list, not simply as an indication that they have to represent the subject, but also as an indication that they realises the importance of acknowledging sources and not plagiarising. In other words, learning to write references in an acceptable form is one of the ‘professional’ skills of a university education which is independent of the discipline or professional course being studied.
Students also need opportunities to practice using the new academic language. This occurs through informal use of the discipline in class and in written course work. Mode of study is important here. Full-time students obtain greater opportunities to practice new discourses but may be learning in a more fragmented manner than part-time students. Moreover, opportunities to discuss with other students and faculty and to receive feedback on their programme of study. Part-time students generally study only one or two subjects at a time, so their exposure to the academic language of the discipline is fragmented. This is an important issue, as there is a general consensus among educators that the ability to talk about the discipline is important for academic success. The lack of opportunities to use the new discourses informally. Where students are following courses closely related to their professional work, however, close links between the two may help to alleviate this problem.

Social science approaches

Those of us whose interest in academic literacies is grounded in socialities and language teaching are familiar with the practical implications of linguistic approaches for teaching more generally. A second group of academic discourses and how these discourses are influenced by a sequence of related approaches to academic discourse, which draws on the work of the French philosopher, Foucault (1987). This approach focuses on how knowledge is created and is concerned with the expression of the abstract ideas which make up the concepts and theories of academic disciplines. The focus is on the development of skills and abilities. Entry to the discourse communities as students learn to reframe ideas in relation to concepts and theories to use the language of the academic community appropriately. In the social sciences the evidence to support the theories is taken from everyday life, requiring students to evidence everyday experience by creating a frame drawn from the concepts and ideas they have learnt in the course. Norbert (1987). At some point students become aware of this change, described here by a student who had just completed the Open University social sciences foundation course. It was a new way of looking at everyday life, to see everyday objects and events, as described in concepts and situations and you had to get your brain into that mode of thinking to understand it. There were specific concepts within individual disciplines such as geography and psychology for example but for the last stage of the course was all about drawing on these individual ideas. It was exciting and fun knowing that you could just pick out from any pool you wished. That's where I'd say my confidence really came (Hoadley-Maidment and Mercer 1987).

The theory emphasizes communication, although Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as having a number of feedback loops. The 'language of these dialogues may not consist solely of spoken or written words, however. In architecture, for example, there is a combination of visual language (drawing of ground plans, elevations, and so on) and spoken language which the professionals need in order to explain the visual language to clients and people such as surveyors, engineers, and builders. In other words, each profession needs a language for talking about practice. A dialogue which is integral to a piece of practical work is likely to start with a problem. Students ask for help from the teachers, so are aware of and a conversational partner which proceeds through questions and answers accompanying drawing, demonstration or musical performance. The conservation provides opportunities to practice the language of the profession and to reframe the professional knowledge appropriately.

Although popular, the reflective practitioner model has been heavily criticized. Toulmin (1993), Ernst (1995) have questioned the model's adequacy. Ernst draws attention to Schön's overemphasizing interest in the creative aspects of professional development and is concerned that in real life there are few opportunities for deliberate reflection as Schön describes it. Ernst concludes that the theory is most useful as a theory to describe metacognition in skilled behaviour, it is not, however, concerned in this context with the role of language or communication in professional learning. If we turn to the way in which students develop the discourse to communicate professionally, there are no other theories which take into account the problem of time and the students' need to develop and reframe the professional knowledge appropriately.

One is his failure to take into account the collective learning that occurs in face-to-face practical classes. For the individual student the dialogue with the tutor/teacher occupies only a small proportion of time—perhaps five minutes in a two-hour session. In between times students get on with their own work: they practice the skills and ask for help when they get stuck. More importantly, they interact with other students, and so the students are not only learning from the teacher but also learning from each other. Learning is, he claims, a ‘singlespinning’ of ideas, where students are part of a collective experience which enables them both to share the discourse and apply it directly to practice, albeit in a sheltered situation. An analysis of workplace-based learning settings would doubtless show similar patterns.

The second failure relates to the particular role of communication in the growing profession. Here communication is not simple for talking about practice but also a vital way of carrying out practice. (The same is true of teaching) Students need to be able to obtain feedback on their communicative skills in the same way that an academic student needs feedback on his drawing skills rather than on his use of surgical instruments. In face-to-face teaching this is often done through videotaped role plays. However, written

Omnipresent discourses

Finally, when we look at the situation of students on professional courses, particularly mature students who have already undertaken vocational training, we need to consider how these discourses relate to the specialist language they may already know and use in the workplace. Occupational groups are exemplars of discursive communities. If we are to value and build on students' experiences as users of occupational discourses, we need to examine the commonalities between the work done by, for example, nurses and social workers, and undergraduate academic writing. In many cases, students will be fluent writers of reports, case notes and case plans, but these follow conventions and use language differently from academic discourses. Closer examination, however, may reveal that vocational genres share some linguistic features with forms of student writing such as project reports. It could be argued that academic literacy is best approached through forms such as these, since students will be building on skills they already have.

Reflecting on personal experience

In developing a theory of professional education, the caring professions have been strongly influenced by two perspectives: first, theories from Schön's (1983, 1987) model of the reflective practitioner: This is concerned with personal learning in the development of professional competence. The base premise of Schön's work is learning in action in which students carry out an action and then think consciously about it. Through 'reflection' they gradually learn to reduce problems and solutions within the discourse of the profession. As there are interesting parallels between Schön's ideology and the discursive approach to discourse outlined above, it is worth considering how this may inform the development of academic literacies. Schön's theory is rooted in the concept of the 'reflective dialogue' that takes in face-to-face teaching situations such as workshops. He describes in detail the inter-relations occurring between learner and teacher while the student is engaged in practicing a professional skill, for example drawing an architectural plan, in a setting where the teacher's role as teacher is subject to much more teacher than initial role as subject to much more teacher than initial role as teacher: it is not seen as a desire for developing competence in practice but as a personal form of critical writing in which students can see notes and abbreviations and include comments. The aim of this approach is to develop professional competence through reflective thought, not to practice writing as preparation for academic assessment.

Academic attitudes to writing in professional education

The School of Health and Social Welfare at the Open University has developed courses for professionals in the health and social care fields using the distance-learning model originally developed by the University for its undergraduate programmes. This uses a core of text-based teaching, which is supplemented by online texts, videos and audio-cassettes. The School emphasizes the value of courses aimed at a wide range of people working in the fields of health and social welfare rather than at one professional group, and has successfully developed a number of self-contained courses and, more recently, diplomas for this group.

One of the main features of the courses is the opportunity for students to draw on their personal and work experience both in understanding academic concepts and forms and in improving their written assessment skills. There is, however, a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that students have difficulty in using the academic discourse of the discipline in their work. This may partly be explained by the fact that courses were developed initially at an academic level equivalent to second-year university study. The courses were designed to meet the needs of students who were new to university study. Most students enrol because the course is work-related and is likely to link academic learning to their professional lives. However, this raises questions as to how the academic writing students are asked to complete relates to their work environment and practice. The demands and assumptions of the assessment strategy, therefore, needs to be taken into account as these students write for a scientific audience.
Issues raised in the survey

Although the questionnaire was brief and relatively unstructured, the results produced were valuable for the common concerns that they revealed. The importance these academics gave to the development of skills in expressing academic argument reflects the centrality of written academic argument to teaching in the UK university system. In social sciences (and arts and humanities), compositional arguments are regarded as the best way of judging whether a student has understood the concepts and issues of a course and developed higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis. At the same time it has been shown that knowledge and argument are differently defined and constructed by different disciplines, and that 'new' disciplines related to professions such as nursing also have informal traditions (Hew and Wixon 1980). In professional education the emphasis on traditional forms of academic writing, such as an essay, is a reflection of the terms in which institutions ask questions about the relationship between vocational training and particular forms of academic writing.

When we turn to the skill of linking personal experience to theory there is broad agreement. There is some support for viewing personal experience as an interpretative framework. Students on professionally related courses need opportunities to practice linking narrative to argument. This operates at a number of levels, from organizing ideas to the use of appropriate grammatical forms. The difficulty identified in the survey is that of mixing the (narrative) experience into a form which illustrates an academic argument based on abstract concepts, issues and theories. One way to teach this is to begin with forms which students feel comfortable using, such as reports and case studies and small investigative projects. These often enable students to draw on work experience for content and to write about this experience in narrative form initially, while at a later point, for example in a discussion, they have to reframe and synthesize this in academic terms.

The main concerns of the academics is summed up in the word 'personal'. The response point to a desire for students to link their practice and theory in a context where the assessment strategy is based on traditional academic examiners. In addition, it is important to consider the discipline, features of supported learning and how these may affect students' development as academic writers. Mitchell (1995), writing about the development of academic argument, says that the basis of most learning in the UK education system is spoken language. This is seen as "open and transformative" while written language is "the aim of closure; the assignment which marks the end of a period of study." (Mitchell 1995: 135). Spoken language provides opportunities for students to try things out. Few students in this means discussing concepts and issues, both inside and outside class. Academically discourse is learnt within a social and collective setting, involving both non-student and student-student interaction. The importance of spoken language in the development of writing as adult students is solidly documented at levels from basic education (Bendor 1968) and return to learning (Garnder 1985) to language support for university students (Clark and Vaux 1992).

In the Open University, as in most distance-learning institutions, not only is the bulk of teaching material in written form, but so is the support. Tuitions are optional and the main form of communication between students and tutors is a highly sophisticated system of written messages about the exchange of written materials, especially students' own writing and feedback on it. Because students lack informal discussion opportunities, they generally do not participate using ideas and concepts in spoken language before they have to write about them. In other words, written language has to fill the role of open and transformative system which Mitchell and others say to be spoken language. While aspects of Open University teaching, such as an institution's delegation of activities and, for example, to increase the interactive nature of study, this does not replace the oral practice at using academic discourse which occurs in informal discussions. One teaching issue is therefore how written language is used to provide practice at using academic English within specific discourse.

The challenge is not based on learning of this sort is building up a steady dialogue of reflection with sufficient feedback loops when there are only limited opportunities to use spoken language in the ways described by Mitchell and Schief. Because it cannot be assumed that all students will take advantage of the interactive nature of the text (there is evidence that many students skip activities) the only dialogue that is guaranteed is the one between students and tutors around the student's assessed written work. Reflective diaries are useful here because they help students refine their existing professional experience as they then make the links between their practice and the theories, concepts and issues connected in the course, within a peer review form of writing which will be assessed.

Task-based learning must also assume that students are, or will quickly become, confident users of written text. Students who enrol on health and social welfare courses for work-related reasons often feel uncertain about expressing themselves in writing at the beginning of the course, especially if they have no background of university study. As the students progress through the course, they may feel less uncertain about expressing themselves in written form with the support of tutors and student tutors. In a seminar or tutorial setting, learning to write about personal experience, as opposed to drawing on it in spoken discussion, becomes a priority. Complaints of students being unable to write, especially the use of archaics and tautologies, makes similar demands.

Additionally, courses frequently ask students to develop higher-order academic competencies while not explaining to them the links between these and the professional education and expertise they already have. It is therefore apparent that students need to know at the beginning of the
course what they will be expected to be able to do in written form by the end. This is to ensure students understand the assessment strategy. Adopting an approach which develops students' academic literacy, by building on those they already have, may mean reinforcing the academic genres in which they are being asked to write early in the course. It also means making sure that students recognize where an academic task such as a project may differ from projects they have done elsewhere. For example, it is not always clear to students how projects differ from essays. Open University students receive assignment briefs containing guidance on completing the written assessments. These often refer to 'arguments' while at the same time failing to say explicitly that projects must relate the data collected to the issues and concepts presented in the course. Since many professional students are familiar with descriptive reports and probably write them regularly themselves, they may feel that the only conclusions they have to reach are those drawn from the data themselves. In other words, they approach an academic assignment in the way they would prepare a report for a case conference, without realizing the difference in both discourse and genre.

Another issue which arises in health and social care courses is how students indicate that they have understood the value base of a course. Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice are central to the caring professions. Guidelines are frequently laid down by professional bodies. For example, in the case of the elderly, the School of Health and Social Welfare offered a course, 'The Disabled Society', which provided a model of disability expressed through a very specific discourse, based on the politics of equal opportunity. It was easy for students to appear to have understood the ideas and concepts being taught because they used the discourse quite confidently in their written work. However, it was also apparent that many of them had understood only at the surface level (Morgan 1993) because when asked to illustrate their answers from their experience they were unable to do so. In other words, the relationship between reflection, literacy and academic understanding was not made.

Practical implications for professional courses

My main concern was initially with distance learning, but I am aware that the rapid growth of open learning and information and communication technology (ICT) means that the issues I identified at the outset are increasingly relevant to all professional university courses. I would particularly draw attention to the following.

There is a need to develop systems for part-time and distance-learning courses which substitute for the kind of communication experienced by students in a classroom setting. There is an emphasis on developed systems for part-time, particularly the opportunity it provides to feedback the academic learning into professional practice on an almost daily basis. Computer conferencing, for example, has potential to serve as a practitioner by providing a 'protected' situation in which students communicate with each other and with the tutor, learning and practicing the academic discourse. Through the setting of appropriate discussion topics it is possible to provide opportunities for students to relate these to practice in a very immediate way. (See Lea, Chapter 4, for further discussion of the relationship between conferencing and learning.)

It is also important to use written tools for learning rather than conflating the learning and assessment function. Reflective diaries, taking experiences and using questionnaires as frameworks for the analysis of critical incidents can all provide opportunities to practice academic discourse and establish feedback loops between academic concepts and professional practice. Course designers must therefore consider how the assessment strategy can best evaluate the type of learning, choosing methods of assessment for their ability to link theory and practice, rather than simply using already existing methods which suit institutional systems and regulations.

Finally, there are staff development implications. Tutors on professional courses are generally recruited because they have appropriate academic knowledge and relevant professional expertise in the teaching skills. Few, however, see themselves as language or communications specialists, assuming that students should have learnt such competencies in an earlier stage and often not feeling confident to undertake what is often perceived as remedial teaching. But the increasing emphasis on universities in developing students' general cognitive skills and the concept of 'graduate skills' points to a changing role for tutors. This means that tutors must feel confident to teach students how to make the links between practice and academic study. For many years in the United Kingdom there has been a movement concerned with 'language across the curriculum'. Although rooted in schools, this is equally relevant to university education. While professional education programmes with practice elements are increasingly tackling these issues (Riess and Watson 1992), they must also be addressed in relation to more traditional open and distance-learning courses.

Conclusion

The real challenge for many professional courses, as teaching methods change in response to new technology, is ensuring that the aims and objectives drawn from the professional requirements of the course are amenable within systems designed for academic learning. Courses such as those I have described being together are no teaching 'traditional' academic learning of theoretical academic knowledge and 'reflective interaction' where the doing informs and is informed by the learning. The first is concerned with developing a range of higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis, while the latter focuses on improved performance.
Issues and questions framing the research

The Open University’s MA programme in education is described as follows in the OU’s own prospectus (Open University 1997: 31):

- The MA has developed a reputation for being both intellectually challenging and professionally relevant:
  - intellectually challenging because you will be asked to address complex issues and come to terms with advanced literature;
  - professionally relevant because you will be encouraged constantly to identify the significance of your study for your everyday work and concerns.

This description neatly encapsulates the two traditions, or ‘orders of discourse’ (Foucault 1972; Faith 1989), which I would argue are core elements of the OU’s MA programme — and indeed many MA programmes in education — attempt to incorporate.

The MA’s principal characteristic is the value placed on the intellectual development of its students at the expense of more practical concerns. This is reflected in the programme’s academic writing component.

With respect to the field of academic literacy, the project is located within, and seeks to make a contribution to, a growing area of research into aspects of academic writing in higher education based on a ‘critical’ perspective on discourse and literacy practices, or what Lea and Street (Chapter 2 of this volume) call an ‘academic literacies’ model. Within this perspective, academic writing is conceptualised as a set of social practices embedded in networks of culture and power. Rather than viewing academic writing as a transparent medium for representing knowledge, or as a set of rules to which students need to accommodate, this perspective views academic institutions as sites of power, and academic writing as a practice where power is exercised and contested.

This project responds to this perspective, and recognises that students’ so-called failures in academic writing may be explained by, for example, their struggle to reconcile their own identities, and purposes for studying, with the authority and control of the institution (Bazerman 1998). Such a perspective has provided a helpful explanatory framework for research into the academic writing career that can be shared by teachers across master’s level courses in education, for reasons which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. For a more detailed elaboration of this perspective on academic literacy, please refer to the Editors’ Introduction to this volume.

Another field of research and scholarship is pertinent to this investigation, and this is the area of ‘professional knowledge’, or ‘expert knowledge’ — and teachers’ professional knowledge in particular. One of the key projects for the research was an observation that many teachers studying within the MA programme experienced considerable discomfort confronting the demands they were attempting to meet, with respect to writing, sometimes leading to fraught conflicts with their tutors. These conflicts reflect the fact that the Open University course materials are generally considered to be exceptional in the extent to which they make such expectations explicit. I suspected that this conflict was part of a conflation of professional discourses and academic discourses in the way writing tasks were described, coupled with a lack of explicitness about the way in which students are expected to negotiate these ways of using language.

Starting points and frames for analysis

The research project represented an attempt to apply some of the theoretical ideas and practical insights arising from recent research into aspects of academic literacy, which has concentrated mainly on undergraduate teaching within traditional academic disciplines, to the comparatively under-researched area of professional-oriented teaching at postgraduate level. The project also sought to apply some of the ideas, emanating from research into the nature of professional training and knowledge, to the specific context of writing — an aspect that tends to be overlooked in such research.

Some modest teachers studying within an MA programme are doing so — at least in part — for professional reasons. Moreover, the courses are at least in part about their professional work. Consequently teachers approach the courses — not necessarily — with the expectation that their professional experience will provide them with many of the resources needed in order to produce assignments and thereby successfully fulfil assessment requirements.

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The Open University MA in education

At any one time there are about 4000 students in the OU’s MA in Education programme in the UK, Ireland and continental western Europe. They are distance learners, working in comparative isolation with multimedia materials and submitting written assignments to a tutor, whose input is at an appropriate level (Bazerman 1998).

The programme is modular; students typically choose any three modules in order to complete their degrees. In 1997 there were 18 modules in the programme (see Table 11.1). Each module differs in the way it organises its materials, and in the way students

Table 11.1 Modules in the Open University’s MA in Education programme, 1997

- ED111 Language and literacy in social context
- ED113 Curriculum, learning and assessment
- ED114 Child development in social context
- ED115 Gender, power and education: equality and difference
- ED1161Curriculum change: equalities in education
- ED211 Primary education: the basic curriculum
- ED212 Early education: assessing and planning learning
- ED213 Science education
- ED214 Technology education
- ED215 Researching mathematics classroom
- ED216 Adult learners: education and training
- ED217 Education, training and employment
- ED121 Mentoring
- ED218 Educational management in action
- ED219 Understanding school management
- ED220 Effective leadership and management in education
- ED221 Educational research methods
- ED222 Educational research in action

progress is assessed. Some modules require students to carry out practical activities in schools; some place greater weight upon students’ understanding and analysis of issues and concepts discussed in the course materials. Some require students to take a formal final examination, and all of them contain some element of research.

An analysis of specifications for written assignments

Most of the chapter reports on the results of one of the main strands in the research project — that is analysing the specifications for written assignments in the OU’s MA in Education programme. This involved a careful analysis of each assignment booklet for the 18 modules in the programme in 1997. These assignment booklets are key documents, since they contain detailed specifications for each assignment a student is required to submit. The specifications sometimes include general advice on writing assignments for the module, as well as guidance notes on each question which aim to help the students and (indeed the tutor) to understand what they assignment expects them to do. The specifications are standard for all students taking the course, but vary in response to the needs of the module. The role of the tutor is therefore to interpret and mediate these requirements rather than to set questions themselves.

Inventory of types of writing across the programme

One element of my research involved compiling an inventory of the types of writing required across the MA programme by analysing the way each assignment on each module was represented in the assignment booklets. This required an analysis of over 100 specifications for written assignments across the programme.

The analysis revealed that, whereas the 18 modules a student chooses to study, they will be expected to produce a wide range of types of writing. Table 11.2 lists the module type of writing that each module specifies. In general, some modules require written assignments across the 18 modules in the programme. These are very superficial analyses of the diversity of types of writing students are required to carry out within the programme. Nevertheless, from this it is clear that an individual student’s programme across the three modules could require them to produce as many as a dozen different types of writing. The meaning of these labels, like ‘essay’ or ‘project report’, varies from module to module, and even within individual modules, even within the same generic label is used. So it is only really by looking at individual assignment specifications that the meaning of these labels is clear. Nevertheless, with all of writing types across the programme — with some students only encountering certain genre categories once or
twice during their studies – it is hardly surprising that some students find it difficult to build up a sense of confidence and progression in their ability to write academically as they move from one assignment to the text, and from one module to the next.

Text analysis of individual assignment specifications

Following the 'inventory' of the assignment specifications, a text analysis was carried out on the wording of each assignment question in the assignment booklets for the 18 modules in the programme, as well as any guidance notes produced by course teams to help students 'unpack' the question. After a preliminary analysis of these texts, four categories of text features were identified as significant:

1. Any explicit explanation of the conventions the student is expected to use.
2. Warnings in which students' professional work as teachers is referred to, and ways in which students are advised to refer to their own professional work.
3. Warnings in which the questions appear to 'position' students with respect to ideas in the course.
4. Uses of imperatives.

Explicit explanations of the conventions the student is expected to use

The analysis revealed that most advice on writing was concerned with structure (for example, suggestions on how to sequence elements of the text) and coverage (which readings should be drawn upon in answering the question) rather than on appropriate forms and uses of language for the piece of writing in question. With one or two exceptions no attempt was made to describe and account for the course team's notion of 'good writing' – let alone to problematise it. A small number of exceptions to this pattern were found. For example, the Child Development team attempted to define its expectations in the following way:

Assignments 01, 02 and 05 are conventional essay questions.

Avoid being simply descriptive or prescriptive. This is an MA course, which demands critical analysis as well as a display of understanding of the course material. A writing of summaries of relevant bits of the Study Guide and readings is not acceptable.

Although the meanings of the key terms in this passage ('descriptive', 'prescriptive', 'critical', 'analysis') are not defined or illustrated, this is one of the very few attempts made by course teams to make explicit the expectations students should meet.

On another issue, that of whether to use the 'first person' voice in assignments, the Child Development team explicitly favours a more detached writing style:

Write impersonally as far as possible avoid first person pronouns.

The Adult Learning team adopts a contrasting position:

It is quite acceptable to write in the first person, but you should avoid personal anecdotes, and will be penalised for rambling or unclear passages.

It should be emphasized that, while the contrast between these two pieces of advice may be noteworthy, they are the only two instances across the 18 modules where the question of 'voice' is explicitly considered at all.

Finally, with only one exception there was no acknowledgement of the differences between course teams in what they expect in this respect. The Educational Management team offers this advice to students about the important differences between the writing style expected for 'management reports' and the kinds of academic writing students may have been required to produce on other courses:

It is important to understand that the E889 assignments are reports on management rather than academic essays. We have found from past experience that some students do not achieve as high a grade as they might have, had they approached the differences between these two types of writing. When writing an academic essay students are sometimes tempted to display their erudition by slipping together numerous quotations from academic authors and using a lot of academic jargon. This style presents the writer from developing and communicating his or her own ideas in a clear and logical structure. It is not suited to the intended audience for a management report, and should be avoided.

It should be noted in passing that this advice could be accused of lamponing to some extent the expectations conventionally associated with academic essay writing. The sarcastic tone adopted when describing the way students 'are sometimes tempted to display their erudition' is not a description that would be universally recognized as one of 'best practice', even for academic essays. Moreover, there is an assumption that achieving clarity and logic is merely a matter of avoiding an over-dependence on quotations and the use of academic jargon, and that students will have been helped to understand what is expected of them by being told what is not expected of them. This point notwithstanding, the passage is significant for the purposes of this analysis, in the sense that it represents the only attempt in any of the 18 assignments booklets to recognize explicitly the fact that students may be approaching the course with a set of assumptions about academic writing that differs from the expectations for E889, based on their previous experience of study, and to point out some of the differences between management reports and academic essays.

Ways in which students' professional work as teachers is referred to, and ways in which students are advised to refer to their own professional work

Of interest here was evidence of course teams' expectations of the ways in which students should and should not draw upon their own professional experience...
experience when answering the question or completing the task assigned. This is an indication of how students should or should not identify the implications of their argument or analysis for their own professional work. Analyzing instances of this feature was seen as one way of examining the way in which professional and academic traditions are played through the different literary traditions and the requirements for writing. This feature of the language was examined in order to see how different course teams handled the tension between these two traditions.

Analysis of this feature of assignment questions revealed wide variations between modules (and to some extent within modules) in the way students are expected to represent their professional work when setting assignments. In some modules (notably Education, Training, and Employability, Child Development, Language and Literature, and Gender Issues in Education) students are expected to keep to a minimum any discussion of professional circumstances, or of the professional development achieved as a result of study—though no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically. The examples of essay-style questions given in Table 11.5 provide an indication of the way the students' professional work is referred to (if at all) in these modules. There is clearly no expectation underlying these assignments that students will look expected to, or even be expected, to draw upon their professional experience as teachers in order to attempt, and succeed at, the writing task. Instead, the most modus in this category there is an implication that students would be penalized if they include more than a passing reference to their professional work when constructing their assignments.

In step 4 you are asked to provide a critical review of the memorizing programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the institution, the students, or mentors; and your own professional development.

In step 5 you are asked to examine the concept of the "memorizing school" and explain the potential for memorizing in other staff development processes within your institution.

You are required to locate your knowledge within the discussion of memorizing taught in the Information Science, Education, Researching Mathematics Classroom, Mentoring, Primary Education (both modules), and Effective Leadership and Management) students are expected to make visible the professional knowledge they have achieved through their study of the course—though here again no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically. "Mentoring," for example, represents the relationship between the student's professional activity and the writing task in this way.

Project 4 is designed to help you look back in a structured manner over the experience of memorizing, and then to look forward to possible developments arising out of that experience. In step 1 you are asked to provide a critical review of the memorizing programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the institution, the students, or mentors; and your own professional development.

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teachers are expected to demonstrate by means of these highly refined writing forms. These advanced course work to make the kinds of professional knowledge they aim to promote through written assignments suggests that these trends have either not been adequate consideration to this extent. Students have not become familiar with the written work in the programme. The most part has been imparted possibly without conscious deliberation from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and may therefore be inappropriate for promoting the professional knowledge that is (implicitly) unavoidable within these courses.

These findings are illuminated by data from the interviews with academics most of whom placed paramount importance upon the practical and professional dimensions of their MA studies, rather than upon their ability to engage with academic debates or to handle theoretical concepts persuasively in their writing. In this sense, the predominance of imperious and traditional academic writing genres within a number of modules is in part for their sense of uncertainty and frustration especially since the reference of such genres in relation to their professional aspirational goals is so rarely articulated within course materials.

The analysis also revealed extreme variation within and between modules, in the styles of writing required, in the kind of advice on writing offered, in the approach towards the tutor's professional experience and expertise, and in the way students were positioned with respect to ideas in the course. These findings help to explain why, through the interview strand of the research, it became clear that the more successful students started from scratch, in their attempt to pursue the ground rules for academic writing, each time they moved to a new module. Less successful students tried to apply the approaches they developed in one module to subsequent modules. Students had little sense of cumulative progress in their development as academic writers, except on a very general level of 'confidence' and 'practice'.

The findings from the analysis of tutors' written feedback on students' assignments also reinforced much of the issues emerging from the analysis of the assignment feedback. All analysis revealed how consistently tutors use their feedback to try to induct their students into a way of using language, which is considered by tutors not only to be unfamiliar to students but also to be an essential part of learning within their field of study. This process mirrors the function performed by specifications for written assignments, which appear to call for genres of academic writing imported from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, rather than genres of writing which have been deliberately adopted, or developed, in order to support the formation of professional knowledge deemed by course teams, and indeed by students, as important.

At this stage, taken together, these findings suggest that the writing assigned to students as part of their MA studies constitutes significantly to the way the programme positions MA students as novices. This does not exist easily with the professional experience these students bring to the process of study, or with the professional purposes many of them have for studying. They are, almost without exception, experienced professionals, studying for largely professional reasons. They fully expect to be somewhat disarmed when they start. They struggle to identify, and learn how to use, specialized new forms in order to succeed in what for many of them is a new field of activity. This in itself does not surprise them. I think that surprises them, though they may not articulate it this way, that is they sign up for the MA for professional reasons, and suddenly find that they are positioned as novice academics rather than as, say, novice imitators of. Much of the language used in the assignment booklets, and the feedback students receive from tutors on assignments, is framed in terms of inducing students into a specialized community of academic discourse. At best, the subliminal message is here is how to be a sociologist, or an applied critical linguist, or a psychologist, or a management theorist. The assumption is nearly, but not quite, that these students aspire to be professional academics like members of the course team and like their own tutors, rather than better informed or more effective professional colleagues. Viewed in this way, the problem can be recast as one of competing conceptions of 'the novice', rather than one of competing orders of discourse which are ultimately linguistic manifestations of this more fundamental tension.

Teachers have already gone through a process of induction into a new community of discourse once before in their previous degree course. That is the professional culture with which they identify, and it is from the perspective of professional culture that they view their MA. They do not embark on their MA studies at the first stage in a career change from professional teachers to professional academics, and yet many of the literary practices in these programmes seem to be predicated on an assumption that they are doing just that.

In this sense, the academic-professional divide is inappropriate: both orders of discourse are professional. The issue, therefore, is one of two professional cultures clashing: the professional culture of schoolteaching and the (higherrun) professional culture of the academy. Whereas schoolteachers embark on their studies in order to enhance their effectiveness and, or status within the professional culture of schoolteaching, the discursive practices of the academy position them as novice academics. Part of the explanation for this must lie in the way that institutions of higher education use language to sustain and legitimate the epistemological claims of its academic staff, and as an ideology which positions students of any type as relatively powerless (Booth, 1974). The ability of these students to criticize the discourse and knowledge that schoolteachers might construct for themselves as professionals as a result of their studies, are only sanctioned by the institution when they can be seen to be successfully realized in the language of the novice academics. I would speculate that the literary practices that have grown up around the study of education originated in contexts where people studying education

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at postgraduate level were negotiating a transition between one culture (schoolteaching) and another (academic research and scholarship). These tensions of academic practice have persisted, despite the fundamental changes that have taken place in the professional and personal circumstances within which most people work towards master's degrees in education. It appears to be the case that much of the literary practices comprising MA in Education courses have evolved from traditional academic disciplines, mainly in the social sciences, at undergraduate level. One possibility is that these practices have simply reproduced themselves within universities, thus making the university community to consider a jot the kinds of knowledge which could and should be stretchable within such programmes, and to develop forms of writing which facilitate the acquisition of such knowledge. Indeed, it may be that conventional academic genres of writing serve to constrain teachers' ability to construct professional knowledge for themselves.

Implications for theory

Although the analysis is still at an early stage, the project has already begun to have some important theoretical implications for academic literacy practices, introduced at the beginning of this chapter (and more fully in the Editors' Introduction to this volume), and at the same time contributed to a new way to the elaboration of a more pluralistic and culturally sensitive perspective on the study of writing in higher education. The considerable range of genres of academic writing which confront MA students in the course of their studies, and the variety of ways students are expected or implicitly expected to develop professional knowledge, demonstrate that this is a fruitful explanatory framework for research of this kind.

Implications for practice

At this stage of the research, two main implications for practice are suggested by the analysis. The first is the need for a more explicit and systematic approach for helping students to identify and to critique the kinds of expectations they are expected to fulfill in relation to written assignments. The analysis of specifications for written assignments in this chapter demonstrate the need for some overarching framework and language to help students to critique the kinds of writing expected of them within MA modules. An adaptation of Fiske's (1989) approach to critical analysis might provide students with the tools to interpret the assumptions underlying written assignments, and to gain a greater understanding of the subject positions such specifications create for them. Evidence from the interviews with students reinforced this finding: none of the students interviewed

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appeared to have a 'metallanguage' for discussing vital aspects of academic writing. Terms such as 'argument', 'critical' and 'analysis', which were often used illuminating explorations and by their tutors in feedback, were still largely mysterious to them. This problem might be especially acute for those students who do not bring them to their study of these courses the particular forms of cultural capital (see Bourdieu and Passman, 1977) which enable other students quickly to identify the discursive ground rules operating within their courses and to produce forms of writing which suit the ground rules. Nevertheless, it is an emergent with which all students on such programmes could potentially grapple.

The second implication for practice is the need for a robust and self-critical debate among academic staff about the most appropriate forms of writing for helping teachers to develop professional knowledge within master's level programmes in education. This debate should begin with a constructive confrontation of the kinds of professional knowledge which such programmes ought to foster, rather than with the forms of writing conventionally associated with the academic disciplines from which the programmes have evolved. We need to think more imaginatively, in order to offer genres of academic writing to MA students which provide support for professional learning, and to problematize the assumptions about academic writing which underlie our advice to students and our work with fellow tutors.

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