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**Editors’ Introduction**

Mary R. Lea and Barry Stierer

In this collection we have brought together 11 articles written by practitioner-researchers working in a range of international university settings. Our broad aim has been to bring the attention of fellow university teachers to some of the exciting work currently being done in the areas of student learning and academic literacy, within what we are calling neo-contexts for student writing in higher education. We use the term ‘neo-context’ to refer to two phenomena in today’s higher education. First, we have in mind the writing practices emerging in settings other than traditional ones (for example, professional training, dance, English for academic purposes, computer conferencing). We also have in mind traditional writing practices emerging within traditional academic disciplines (for example, ‘writing journals’ in anthropology, and ‘reflection 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 and theoretical insights 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 these 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 developing 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 ‘teaching quality audits’ by national funding bodies. As a result, institutions are devoting more attention to the processes of teaching and learning, and more resources to the continuing professional development of their teaching staff. As an example, in the UK the implementation of the recommendations of the HEFCE (the UK Higher Education Funding Council for England) 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, 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 lifeworld 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 cope with the demands of university study, but also new-style 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; 1989; 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. Most 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 organisation. Explanations for students who experience problems with writing tend to locate the problem as a defect in the student rather than the way in which the ‘ground rules’ of academic writing become established and negotiated in particular academic contexts. This traditional ‘skills-based’ approach to student writing reflects most clearly in the growing tendency to construe the teaching of writing as marginal ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ units, raising 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 contextualised 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;
- the opening up of new routes into university study;
- the increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of students, in part due to the above two factors;
- the move away from curricular delivery within clearly defined academic disciplines to interdisciplinary courses;
- the growth of vocationalisation oriented programmes, including courses for professional training, retraining and in-service training;
- the move away from fixed progression through degree programmes;
- increasing use of modular programmes;
- the diversification of assessment methods incorporating a wider range of written genres (such as accreditation of prior learning, use of portfolios for assessment).

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

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

- The changing context in higher education forms an integral feature of setting and assessment practices, rather than mere 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 result of careful research on our part in current trends and developments in educational practice. We have aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the work being done in the field of writing, and through our partnership with practitioner researchers in the UK and abroad, we became aware of the growing body of work being done in the area of writing in higher education. As such, we invited key practitioner researchers in the field to contribute to this volume, with the intention of bringing their work to the attention of a wider audience.

The result of this background research and coordination is a volume which is highly diverse. The chapters in the collection vary considerably in the scope and depth of their analysis, and in the academic and professional backgrounds upon which they draw to support their arguments. Although many of the authors write in a way that might broadly be described as a 'social science research' style, this is by no means true of all of them. The concerns of some authors is primarily to give a greater understanding of some aspect of the student experience, while for others the overriding aim has been to analyze and critique some aspect of teaching practices. Some authors frame their chapters using concepts and models drawn from research and scholarship, while others adopt a more pragmatic approach with the intention of drawing out the implications of this for the practice of teaching. Some authors aim to offer a more detailed analysis of the current practice to give a clearer understanding of the nature of different teaching practices and the use of technology. We aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in the field of writing in higher education.

Before moving on to discuss the themes and issues addressed by our contributors, we feel it is important to offer one point of clarification. Both the editors and readers of this book may be troubled by the tone used by some authors. To be specific, it may appear that one or other of the authors is being overly critical, or that the discussion is gratuitous 'teacher-bashing'. It is true, however, that the authors have attempted to create an 'environment of open discussion' in which the purpose of the discussions is to encourage students to develop their own ideas and to articulate their own views. This has certainly not been our intention. We believe that educational research at all levels is not only a way of creating an environment of democratic, open discussion, but also of affirming one's respect for the work of fellow teachers with that of subject teaching practices. This aim has not been achieved, but it is certainly possible that none of the contributors to this book shared the same motivation for writing and sharing their ideas.

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In the chapters that follow, we have drawn out what we see as the main ideas and issues that underpin the study of writing in higher education. We have organized this overview by means of the three broad themes which recur throughout the volume.

1. Writing in the disciplines: the challenge of new contexts

Writing in the disciplines: the challenge of new contexts

Until fairly recently, the prevailing view of academic writing, and possibly also of the academic community as a whole, was that writing was both homogeneous and traditional, and that this was not unreasonable to expect students to be able to write before entering the academy. This view reflects a historical context of higher education in which a small number of privileged tiers of students followed fixed-level single-subject or possibly joint honours degree courses in traditional academic subjects. However, as we illustrate above, higher education has changed rapidly, particularly in the last decade, and our social practice of writing is changing too to reflect this. The implications of these changes would have direct implications for the student writer. The chapters in this volume provide evidence for this and the need to take account of the different writing requirements which exist at all levels of disciplines, subjects, courses, units or individual tutors.

There is now an increasing recognition of fundamental differences between academic disciplines in terms of the written genres students are expected to produce in different environments. For example, writing in history is not the same as writing in psychology; and writing in fields such as business studies or environmental studies requires engagement with a number of disciplinary genres. Much of the exploratory work into the nature of disciplinary genres has been undertaken at school level in Australia (Ballard and Martin 1995); in terms of higher education, this focus on disciplinary differences takes little account of the nature of writing in interdisciplinary environments or in emergent disciplinary areas. Many of the chapters in this volume challenge the view of teaching fixed disciplinary genres, as a strategy for supporting students, through an exploration of what is involved in writing in both old and emergent disciplinary areas. Mike Bourn in Chapter 1, for example, shows that research now indicates that even in what may be regarded as traditional academic disciplines there is increasing evidence that these disciplines do not constitute the homogeneous
discourse communities one might argue. He suggests, therefore, that disciplinary difference has implications for student writers' and students' identities and the extent to which their identities are seen as belonging to a particular discipline. This is what we mean by the term 'disciplinary identity'.

2. Writing and identity: a focus on life and work contexts

Writing and identity: a focus on life and work contexts

This chapter focuses on the social construction of identity as a way of understanding the nature of identities and the role of writing in shaping them. It explores the ways in which the identities of writers are constructed and contested through their participation in the writing process, and the ways in which these identities are shaped by the social contexts in which they are constructed. It argues that the writing process is a dynamic and complex process that is shaped by a range of factors, including the social, cultural and institutional contexts in which it takes place. It explores the ways in which these contexts influence the way in which writers construct and negotiate their identities, and the implications this has for the ways in which writing is used to shape and maintain identities.

3. Writing in the social sciences

Writing in the social sciences

This chapter focuses on the use of creative writing in higher education, and specifically the role of writing in facilitating the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. It explores the ways in which creative writing can be used to support the learning process, and the ways in which it can be used to foster the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. It argues that writing can be used as a powerful tool for facilitating the development of these skills, and that it is important for students to be encouraged to engage with these skills as early as possible in their academic careers.
and their own personal experience. Arising from these chapters are questions about the relationship between these new forms of writing and more traditional forms observed. The authors explore some of the tensions that exist for student writers in these new contexts as they engage with forms of writing which have not been taught. They see this as a factor in the development of the concept of a "disciplinary" or "professional" writer. In "A new role for students in "writing for learning" (Times Higher Educational Supplement, 13 January 1999), at the same time that this paper being brought to the attention of teachers and some elements of the professional world, the concept of the professional writer takes on new meaning.

These trends carry with them significant implications for student writing and learning. For example, students engaged in professional training might be expected to acquire themselves with the specialized professional discourses of the workplace they are preparing to enter, and at the same time be expected to demonstrate such knowledge and understanding by means of vernacular written genres, that is, the language-learning demands. And for professionals entering (or returning to) universities for postgraduate or inservice education and training, there may well be repeated tensions between their existing professional expertise and their needs for written and oral communication, and for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of new written and oral communication.

With these issues in mind, it is clear that writing is an important aspect of academic, professional, and personal development. The study of writing is an important aspect of the curriculum, and the development of writing skills is essential for success in higher education. The study of writing is essential for the development of critical thinking and the ability to communicate effectively. The study of writing is essential for the development of a lifelong learning habit, and the ability to participate in the academic and professional communities. Writing is essential for the development of the ability to express oneself clearly and effectively, and the ability to collaborate with others.

Writing and vocationally oriented study in universities: are the "old" genres up to the job?

Universities have been involved in the training and development of professional writing for a long time. Indeed it has sometimes been said, only partly jokingly, that universities have been equipped with a professional writer's toolkit to hand to new students in their first courses. The study of writing is essential for the development of critical thinking and the ability to communicate effectively. The study of writing is essential for the development of a lifelong learning habit, and the ability to participate in the academic and professional communities. Writing is essential for the development of the ability to express oneself clearly and effectively, and the ability to collaborate with others.

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Writing and students' identities: whose agenda, whose knowledge, whose written forms?

We return here to a suggestion made earlier that student writing at universities has to be regarded as both homogeneous and transferable from contexts to contexts both from outside and within the university. Implicit in this perspective is the assumption that writing is concerned with a set of decontextualized skills which bear little relationship to issues of personal or professional identity. Many of the authors in this volume see issues of identity as playing a part in student writing. They conceptualise the academic writing as made up of student writers who are present as result of the interaction between academic ways of knowing and writing, and other ways of knowing and writing from other material contexts. They argue that academic writing is constructed in different, specific contexts, and that these contexts are constructed in different ways.

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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, Scott (1998) further explores the importance of the self by making distinctions between the 'narratobiographical self', the 'discoursed self' and the 'self as author'.

In Chapter 6, Phillippe Crome examines the nature of 'the personal' in student writing, and suggests that in their journal writing students were able to present a stronger 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 about a subject area - social anthropology - which encourages reflection on the one hand and yet recognises 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 closer 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 salable to see students' written work as examples of discourses shaped by social conventions - as displays of 'performance' rather than as 'competence'. As she puts 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 of the writer's sense of self in the conflicting worlds of the university and the school.

In Chapter 3, Rex Bawden, Benny Clark and Rachel Rimmershaw 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 them/themselves, if they receive feedback indicating that their work is inadequate this easily 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 4 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 student and tutors implicitly make commitments to their view 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 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 Scott see issues of identity and personal as central to their model of academic literacy which recognises 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 professionals who can find themselves positioned as novices 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 oriented 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 reinscribed 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 commitments 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 belonging to a certain discipline. These very even within disciplines: a reader response critic will emphasize 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 assumes, even when it is discussing phenomena of heterogeneity, blurring and crossing (see Kien 1993), the lineaments of traditional disciplines. In a set of interrelated studies conducted in the University of Technology, Sydney (Barnes et al. 1999; Lee et al. 1995; Goethen 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 harassed first-year nursing student, hurrying from lecture to tutorial, backpack full of photocopied 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 disciplinarity (see Mercer-Osborne et al. 1995) emphasise that, rather than being homogeneous and discrete disciplines, academic disciplines are radically heterogeneous and consist in difference. Newer research is more attuned than ever before to the ‘peripheries’ of academic disciplines. University disciplinary heterogeneity and difference have significant implications for student academic writers who can be understood as writing themselves into a ‘disciplinary politics’, by which I mean the internal tensions and conflicts over issues such as what counts as knowledge, what should be seen as the curriculum and how it should be valued, where boundaries within and between disciplines are 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 nurse 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 academic 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, a ‘contextual’, linguistic approach assumes a relatively homogeneous discipline, with test texts to be discovered, analysed and taught. The third, a ‘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 ‘discursive community’. Where the disciplinary positions are conflictual, overlapping or indeed blurred, the student academic writer is working within the disciplinary politics that is produced. Lea and Street (Chapter 2) also explore a pragmatic approach 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 particularity is a context to an understanding of academic writing (understood as both process and product) and the ways in which students learn to write within the specific writing positions in text. A concept like ‘writing position’ cannot be fully or richly understood without a discussion of the different ways in which counts as knowledge and what counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the awareness of internal diversity and conflict, as realised in the politics of the discipline.

So where does this leave the student writer? It is the concluding section of this chapter that attempts to say what this writing pedagogy must teach the student writer. We must concern ourselves with disciplinarity, disciplinarian and consequent writing positions central – in other words, as Graff (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we must ‘teach the coalface’.

The academic writing, disciplinarity 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 making 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, focus on the diversity within disciplines as well as across them, a point that is picked up and expanded by Goggin (1993: 12):

What complications research and pedagogy in writing in the disciplines at student level and at the discipline level exist not only across disciplines, but also within disciplines. As Kenneth Rancio (1987: 533) has illustrated, though institutional boundaries conventionally demarcate different classes of academics, the situation is actually more complicated. There is diversity within disciplines and different types of professionals exist side by side in the same setting. Rancio’s argument is supported by Kell and Kirsie’s (1993) 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. Klein 1993). 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 conventional fiction of a homogeneous history, geography or sociology.

New and emerging disciplinary areas

The authors reviewed so far have been concentrating on the disciplinary core 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 so much on the formation of professions, nurses, adult educators, engineers, what might be called ‘practical-based’ disciplines.

These case studies typically draw on a range of disciplines. Let us take adult education as an example. The adult education theorist Gail L. Folkes (1995: 15) identifies a range of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, geography, philosophy and economics, which impact on adult education as a field of study. Knowledge from these disciplines is, of course, not
Table 1.1: The disciplinary politics of nursing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice-based</th>
<th>Professionalised</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical knowledge</td>
<td>Theoretical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous disciplinary base</td>
<td>Heterogeneous disciplinary base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical subjects (positivist)</td>
<td>Ethical subjects (interpretative/critical)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| Processes of disciplinisation: nursing as a ‘proper’ discipline; nurse educators as ‘proper’ academics

Gender politics of the nursing profession: ‘doctors and nurses’

Nursing is a relatively young academic discipline. Like other disciplines which have attempted to establish respect and credibility, such as sociology and sociology, nursing has sought to do this by imitating 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 nursing as a feminised 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 working in theoretical areas and those in practical areas which is nowhere near being bridged and it will be a long time before it’s bridged. This puts us in an interesting position. It is probably less problematic now but 1-2 years ago when our students went out 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 gap is still unfilled.

(Lecturer interview)

I think those tensions reflect the tension for nursing because the university seems to be teaching people about all these ‘silly’ 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 student experience the disciplinary tensions between nursing as a science-based curriculum and its ethic, 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, now drugs, etc., but I was surprised they are a lot of articles based on hazards happening in the workplace, nurses’ perceptions of pain, nurses’ fears 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 programme:

But for medical, surgical, if you want to write about care for a person with AIDS, you either 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 and how the heart works, how it pumps, where it goes wrong and why does, the patient present with each and each 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 certain things did catch my attention, especially the need for nurses to prove that we are people with nurses, we’re not just handmaidens, which I always felt, I felt that it was never being argued enough about but I knew now 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 for, and we were never taught why nurses need autonomy, why you should feel you have a decision to make about your patients’ well being. We were always 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

that 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 positivist scientific perspective and the medical science discipline, 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 in 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 different and siloed-off approaches to understanding nursing and they 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 as clear, though I would certainly have some sympathy with those views that derive from the non-positional epistemology, post-structuralist thinking. Although I’m not always in agreement with them, they are applied to nursing, but my background would be more akin to those approaches.

Another lecturer speaks more extensively about the tensions between the scientific and humanistic-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 now we’re doing things like important skills to develop a student’s thinking, their critical writing skills, there is much less emphasis on how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study. 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 less emphasis about how to study.

The tension between positivist and critical hermeneutic versions of what counts as knowledge, the shift towards professionalization of nursing, the emphasis on nursing as a ‘proper’ academic discipline are common to the practices within which the student are writing. I will illustrate this in the next section with an example from a first-year undergraduate nursing writing task.

"Professional responsibilities in nursing” essay topic

The ‘professional responsibilities in nursing” subject comes from the first year of the undergraduate nursing course. As suggested above, it focuses on the changing social roles of the nursing profession and encapsulates many of the tensions we have been exploring in the nursing education curriculum, particularly in relation to the professionalization of nursing. The writing task demanded of the students is an expository essay which explicitly invites the students to address the professional issue:

Nurses will not be able to properly fulfill their professional responsibilities until they have greater autonomy and authority – discuss.

Students taking up writing positions: voicing in the nursing essay

Drawing on notions of ‘authorising’, ‘authority’ and ‘authorisation’ of youth studies (see Lindfors 1995), I will examine a range of ways in which student nurses authorise statements, including through the incorporation of the voices of others into their essay. Utilising the most commonplace strongly authored statements in the essays tend to be supported by appeals to the literature (theory/knowledge), others – fairly highly valued, as it turns out – produce appeals to experience (practical knowledge), ‘what nurses think’ and ‘doctor’, rather than what the literature says or what nurses think in support of their developing argument. Both strategies interpellate the voices of others into the text – on the one hand, those that are clearly linked to established academic sources, on the other the voice of experience. We, as we shall see, is a way to set up a simple equation between wealthy-authored statements invoking experience and strongly authored statements invoking theorised knowledge. From other highly valued essays we will examine data showing how the student nurses can produce strongly authored statements by appealing to experience, apparently floating the academic ‘requirements of appealing to theorised knowledge. I would suggest that an explanation for this apparent anomaly lies in the disciplinary politics of nursing itself, in its emergence as a discipline, in the dual nature of different constructions of nursing, specifically between nursing as a field of practice and nursing as a professionalised and thus theorised discipline.
Here are some examples of the two contrasting ways in which the student writers authorized statements in their essays. The first is an authorization based on experience and research typically do:

Lack of sufficient autonomy and authority is seen when a nurse has to have a physician authorize a pathology test 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 treated and has no further need of an intravenous drip, they have to inform the doctor who will then authorize the removal of the cannula. 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 greater autonomy and decision making on the part of nurses are shown to be improving care for the patient, are authorized by examples from communication, through choosing appropriate times, means and how it is significantly reinforced when the writer uses the phrases communication, referencing conventions to authorize a particular statement, based on experience from the field rather than from an academic source.

According to Kierkegaard (1888) nurses have been making independent decisions regarding management of their patients without wanting to accept accountability for their decisions.

So Kirsten's essay uses a mix of these two strategies, which seems to be successful, as her essay is well received. The market's 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, those who drew on both the author's experience and the academic sourcing strategy, other essays, such as Sue's (graded A) and Lorraine's (Graded B) rely almost entirely on the academic sourcing strategy. Virtually every statement these make can be traced back to an academic source:

Ironically, Homann (1967) 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 Schaulenberg (1988, cited in Collins and Henderson 1991: 25), claims that nurses preferred to work in an environment which encouraged autonomous practice. Furthermore, Schoon (1992) confirmed their claims and created a label that a number of research including her own, have discovered a positive link between autonomy and job satisfaction.

(Sue)

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

In the health care system the doctors have the most autonomy and authority and this 'male-dominated paradigm' used the path to professionalism to ensure themselves of financial security and autonomy (Short and Sharmen 1987: 199). 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 those who have already benefited from their standing as a profession. This push for nurses to become professionals makes sense on the basis that medical practitioners are 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: 150). 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 procedures should be reviewed and that changes 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 authors, 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 procedures should be reviewed and that changes 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:

Mark's essay: thematizing the argument

Mark's essay is one of the most highly rated by the marker (+) yet it does not rely heavily on the double academic sourcing strategy which we saw in Sue and Lorraine's essay:

Due to the fact that the nursing profession is so diverse and becoming more so, until nurses unite, establish their practice at different levels and situations, their levels of autonomy and authority will be underemphasized, nurses are taking responsibility for their practice and gaining a new autonomy in their work (Reid 1993: 50) and Flin (1995: 66) agrees 'nurses in a professional role, whether lawyer, doctor, teacher, or midwife, must be able to practice autonomously and use his or her professional judgement'. This brings into the argument that some nurses want to take greater control of their work load and duties, and be accountable for them, whilst some want to take minimum control. However, in direct contrast to these ideas, is the dominance that doctors have over nurses. Leech (1993) discusses that, with few exceptions, nurses work under medical control. The medical profession controls admissions, discharges and what goes on in between, even if the patient had been admitted for purely nursing care. There is going to be conflict between the nurse and the doctor, and if, according to the definitions of autonomy stated earlier, the right of self government to determine the course of one's life by oneself is accepted, then these nurses are not fully autonomous, and therefore unable to have full responsibilities for nursing decisions.

This, one could argue, is possibly one of the reasons many nurses have sought to become nurse practitioners. The latter want to be given full responsibility for nursing management decisions, to be able to implement those decisions using autonomy and to be held accountable for those decisions.

Instead, what Mark seems to do is thematize the argument, concentrating not on what the research literature tells us nurses think/feel/do or on what experience tells us, but on the implications of the arguments (between autonomy and accountability, between different roles of the health care profession, between doctors and nurses). Mark seems to take up a comments summation view, using Derek's 'computer printout'. In the first paragraph of her essay, the effect is destabilized because the reader/marker recognizes a version appropriate from the subject outline. Where Mark quotes it is
to back up or elaborate an argumentative position that he has already introduced. The strategy is therefore quite different from that of Bose 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 (1995). The skills-based approach to the teaching of academic writing assumes that there was a general set of skills and strategies that can be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. The text-based approach assumes relatively homogenous disciplinary, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. I am suggesting, in line with writers such as Rall et al. (1990) 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 ‘pursuing’ – representations of disciplinary activity 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.

(Bull et al. 1990: 357)

Where the disciplinary positions are conflicted, overlapping or indeed blurred (see Geczi 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, disciplinatization and consequent writing positions central – in other words, as Gelfg (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we must ‘reach 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 way of knowing that it makes authoritative and, on the other hand, the professionalized, disciplinary account of nursing, with its consequent individualization and generalization of the nursing subject. We have seen how these conflicts work within the texts examined earlier, producing at one moment highly valued, if docile, texts in the individualized disciplinary voice (Sue and Lorrain’s); Other similarly valued essays (Karen and Mark’s) draw on the strategy of authorization from experience, though running the risk of the critical marker’s comments. The less successful essay (Karen and Deirdre’s) appear to fail both in making authoritative statements in the individualized disciplinary voice and in the generalized experiential voice of ‘what nurses think’. Mark’s essay seems to thematize an assumed textual exigency: the experiential/practitioner account and the individualized disciplinarian account of nursing. While appearing somewhat unconventional, i.e. not docile, 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 impersonalized disciplinary voice and the consequent availability of writing positions are a major theme of the work of both and others (see Hand and Sampson 1992) on critical language awareness approaches to the teaching and learning of academic writing, as they are in Rall et al. (1990) and, indeed, are taken up by other writers in this volume (see Stierer, Chapter 11). Here they map very specifically on to the shift of nursing into the academy with its consequent professionalization and disciplinatization. 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 meanings of plagiarism, to give the skills to quote and reference effectively). It provides a complement to those 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 teachers/markets 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 sets of characterizing 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, for example, incorporating wordings and meanings into text. They will to a 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 problems 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 its 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 southeastern 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 simply locating 'problems' with individual students. One of the main purposes of the research has been to move away from a skill-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 literacy can be taken as given. In contrast, 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 constructed 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 those 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 literacy studies' (Bardini 1994; Bamford 1996a; Street 1984). This view drew out the implications of this approach for our understanding of issues of student learning. We have argued elsewhere (Lea and Street 1997a) that educational research into student writing in higher education has faltered into three major perspectives 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 now them in a simple linear time dimension, whereby one model progressed by a plausible metaphor, see Figure 2.1. Rather, we would like to think that each model successively encapsulates those above it, so that the academic socialization perspective can be included in the academic literacies model, building on the insights developed there as well as the study skills view. The academic literacies model, then, incorporates both of the other models in 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 researching as well as in teaching, educators need to consider specific skills issues around student writing, such as how to improve or change an essay or whether to use the first person, taken 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 such students in their first year of study, and another five were interviewed, either individually or in small groups. At the new university, 15 members of academic staff and 35 students were interviewed in the same way. The interviews at both institutions included the direction of quality assurance units and 'learning support' staff.

One of 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 (Gove and Boote 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 this textual material. As the research progressed we realized that this was an equally important source of data which we needed to explore in depth in a way which would enable us to benefit from our own situated knowledge of the institutional settings within which we were researching. Adopting 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, then, was not based on a representative sample from which generalizations of the view that students could be 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. In this approach, therefore, was an ethnographic tradition described by Mitchell (1984). Rather than applying 'ethnographic description' (as in much social science), these are our attempts to understand the terms in which phenomena are constructed and, for establishing the 'representativeness' of social data, Mitchell (1984) describes 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 theoretically valid linkages between events and phenomena which previously were incoherent.

(Mitchell 1984: 239)

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 positions and connections that might not 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 accounts can, for instance, provide evidence for differences between staff and students' understanding of the writing process at levels of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge rather 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 understand the literacy requirements of their own subject area and make these explicit to their students. We grasped the opportunity to reflect upon the writing practices of the university, at different levels and in different courses. Moreover, we had to consider what influences were being brought to bear upon them not only from practice, but also from the requirements of different courses and subject areas. We also collected copies of documents from both staff and student handouts on everyday writing. We asked students to outline, as they saw them, the writing requirements of their own disciplines and subject area, and to describe the kinds and quantities of writing that were involved for their students. We also asked them to talk about their perceptions of student writing problems and the way in which these were addressed at both an individual and departmental level. Students explained the problems that they experienced with writing at the university and their perceptions of the writing requirements of different courses and subject areas. We also collected copies of documents from both staff and student handouts on everyday writing. We asked staff to outline, as they saw them, the writing requirements of their own disciplines and subject area, and to describe the kinds and quantities of writing that were involved for their students. We also asked them to talk about their perceptions of student writing problems and the way in which these were addressed at both an individual and departmental level. Students explained the problems that they experienced with writing at the university and their perceptions of the writing requirements of different courses and subject areas. We also collected copies of documents from both staff and student handouts on everyday writing.

Additionally, some academic staff were teaching in courses where even the traditional disciplines were looking at new ways of engaging with writing that discipline outside the academic community, developing what we term 'empathy' writing; in physics, for instance, students were asked to write texts for non-specialist audiences, such as the public; in common core courses, for example, government courses, to 'empower' their readers' lack of disciplin ary knowledge and at the same time to account for the particular need to know. In management science, mathematical principles were used to address commercial problems, and writing reports for general audiences was an essential part of student writing for assessment. The writing requirements of these exercises differed from those of more standard writing, but the same students may engage both in their progress through a degree programme.

Despite this variation in modes of writing across disciplines and fields of study, many of us were still influenced by specific conceptualizations of their own disciplines or subject area in our assessments of students' writing. The bin concept of 'structure' and 'argument' came to the fore in most interviews, as being key elements in student writing, terms which we examine more closely below. Even though staff generally had a clear belief in these concepts as crucial to their understanding of what constitutes successful writing, there was less certainty when it came to describing what underlay a well-argued or well-structured piece of student work. More commonly, they were able to identify what a student had been successful, but could not describe how a particular piece of writing 'lacked' structure. We suggest that, in practice, what makes a piece of student writing 'appropriate' has more to do with issues of epistemology than with the surface features of form to which staff often have recourse when describing student writing. That is to say, underlying, often disciplinary, assumptions about the nature of knowledge affected the way in which we approached the themes of 'structure' and 'argument'. Since these assumptions varied with context, it is not valid to suggest that such concepts are generic and interchangeable between different 'common sense ways of knowing' (Fitzgerald 1992), as the reference to 'writing problems' frequently implied in what they believed that this finding has considerable implications for current attempts to define generic skills.

The research data, then, suggest that, while academic staff can describe what constitutes successful writing, difficulties arose when they attempted to make explicit what a well-developed argument looks like in a written assign-
Writing requirements: student interpretations

The research interviews with students revealed a number of different interpretations and understanding of writing which students thought that they were meant to be doing in their writing. Students described taking "ways of knowing" (Ryle et al., 1995) and of writing from one course into another to find that their attempt to understand was unsuccessful and met with negative feedback. Students were conscious aware 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 great, such as the "cause" or "report," bring more deeply to writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting.

Students knew that variations of form existed, but admitted that their real writing difficulties lay in trying to grasp the deeper levels of variation in knowledge and how to set about writing. It was much more true of the course in using the correct terminology or just learning to do "academic writing," as what they term the "academic socialisation" that they would suggest. It is a question about adapting previous knowledge of writing practices, academic and other, to varied university settings.

The thing I'm finding most difficult in my first year here is moving from subject to subject and knowing how you're meant to write in each one. I'm really aware of writing for a particular term as well as for a particular subject. Everybody seems to want something different. It's very different to A levels, where we used dictated notes for essay writing.

Such common comments in interviews with students did not appear to support the notion of generic and transferable writing skills across the university. Students themselves often internalised the language of feedback. They knew that it was important to present an argument and they knew that structure placed an important part, but had difficulties in understanding when they had achieved this successfully in a piece of writing. Students would frequently describe how they had completed a piece of work that they believed was very good and richly argumentative, but often failed to receive a very low grade and fairly negative feedback. They often felt unsure and confused about what they had done wrong. What seemed to be an appropriate piece of writing in one field, or indeed for one individual, was often found to be quite inappropriate for another. Although students frequently had guidelines, either from individual tutors or as departmental documents on essay writing, they found that these often did not help them very much with this level of writing. They felt that such guidelines dealt with matters that they knew from A level or access courses. These involved issues broadly defined as structure, such as how combined with the formal organization of a piece of writing — introduction, main body, conclusion — or as an argument, involving advice on the necessity of developing a position rather than providing just a description or narrative. Students could assimilate general advice on writing "techniques" and "skills" but found it difficult to move from the general to using this advice in a particular text in a particular disciplinary context. In both universities, the majority of the documents offering guidelines of this nature that we analysed took a rather technical approach to writing, which included rules of surface form: grammar, punctuation and spelling. They also dealt fully with referencing, bibliographies and footnotes, and supplied warnings about plagiarism. They reach dwell on the fact that students who had most difficulty grasping in terms of how to write specific, course-based knowledge for a particular term or field of study.

The conflicting advice received from academic teaching staff in different courses added to the confusion. For example, in sociological studies, were more specifically directed to outline in detail what would follow in the main body of the essay.
has only to imagine other kinds of modality that could be expressed in this context to recognize the conventional and categorical nature of the usage mitigated comments such as "you might like to consider," have been thought about, "in my opinion," perhaps, and open-ended questions such as "could 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 implied by the comments we describe here. in these the tutor clearly and firmly takes authority, assuming the right to criticize 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 anthropologist 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 socialization 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 maintainer 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 studios 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 recreated by students after module completion.

The problem with the modular system is that every piece of work they have to 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 participants. 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 problems tend to be explained mainly with respect to the students themselves or seen in a consequence of the mass introduction of 'non-traditional' students. From an academic literacies perspective such explanations are limited and will not provide the basis for reflection on learning and teaching in higher education that Bear (1997) and others are calling for. Explorations of these issues within an academic literacies perspective may provide, we suggest, a fruitful area for research and for teacher training in higher education in the coming years.

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Staff Feedback: An Academic Literacies Approach

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 tutors 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 a remedial study skills or learning support unit. 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 assignment titles, tutor feedback on students' 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-staff interactions, and the institution, now need to be examined more fully against the changing 'fields of study' and 'course switching' to which we have referred. All three, 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 conceptualized 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 Ivančič, Bavya Clark and Rachel Rimmerman

Introduction

Students receive an immense variety of types of response to their writing, all conveying 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 messages, how to respond to the responses. 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 recognize the sorts of effects their responses may have on the fledgling writers in their charge.

1 The data for this paper comprise a selection of responses by tutors to examined 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 relate 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 to some extent responsible for their ways 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. Tutor C’s situation is similar, in that her course is compulsive and graded. The difference is that she uses the “process approach” to the teaching of writing, which involves a lot of deleting, discussion, and redrafting 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. Tutor D, on the contrary, 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 curriculum. 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 their responses in all this. They will have developed particular working practices to support these beliefs. These tutors who give minimal responses perhaps see the task of 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 comments were written. Tutors in subject teaching organize their courses in such a way that they have time to see their students’ writing in progress, enormously desirable

<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 free lines in black ink at the end of the essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor C</td>
<td>An occasional tick in the margin in red ink</td>
<td>Six free lines in red ink at the end of the essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor D</td>
<td>22 numbers on the text in pencil, with handwritten notes in pencil on a separate sheet</td>
<td>More than 22 lines at the beginning of the word-processed notes, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor E</td>
<td>28 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>Communicative Skills Course</td>
<td>EAP tutor A: several handwritten, many lines, crosses, short comments and corrections, written directly on the student’s text in red pen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor B</td>
<td>Communicative 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 C</td>
<td>Communicative Skills Course</td>
<td>About four lines in pencil at the end of the numbered comments</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 expect the subject tutor to write something to support that grade. Subject tutors vary enormously, however, in whether and how much they expect the students to give 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, on the other hand, 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 often 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” – deducing – what the students have written. We suggest that the separate document is more respectful to the students’ writing than comments written directly on it.

The four EAP tutors may equally stress the balance between general and specific comments, but in the place of these comments. EAP tutor B’s style is, perhaps, typical of the uncertainty or insecurity on the part of many tutors to what, exactly, the status or function of their responses is. EAP tutor C: and D, on contrast, are working with a very clear view of what they are doing and why. They share the “staging, not altering” philosophy associated with the “process approach” to the teaching of writing (see Freedman 1980 for reading teaching; and Clark and Isaacs 1997, Chapter 4, for discussion of issues associated with this approach). This means that the main purpose of responses is to help students improve their own work, which they will then refill after the tutor has seen them. For EAP tutor C, there is even a need to “reject the student’s text”, as we mentioned when discussing subject tutors D and E, because this text is a rough draft. The responses are part of an ongoing collaboration between tutor and student to produce a good end product; hence the comments and suggestions written in any available space on the text. Tutor C is also working with the philosophy of “exclusively positive comments”, advocated by some “process approach” theorists and practitioners (see Zab 1990). Even though EAP tutor D is not himself a subject tutor, he makes an enormous number of responses to specific details of comments in the text, rather than corrections of its form. This focus on meaning reflects EAP tutor B’s belief that coherence is a crucial aspect of academic writing, and that this depends on meaning, not form.

Both subject tutor E and EAP tutor D write their responses with the express intention of discussing them in a one-to-one tutorial 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 student has written; their comments are not final, but part of a dialogue.

The choice of writing implements is interesting, too. In our sample, these include pencil, black ink, green pen, red pen and word processor. It may be easier, more interesting, to suggest that these choices make a difference, but some students have said to us that this is not the case. Writing in pencil suggests tentative; it can be discussed, rubbed out, altered. It also suggests that, even collaboration between student and tutor: the pencil margin notes are there to help the student rather than to put them in their place. At the other extreme is the red pen. This is essentially 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 how important she thinks it is 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 word-processed notes seem formal, fixed and immutable; then do not have the personal, provisional quality of the pen-and-rubber 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 purposely focusing on samples which include negative comments, as these allow us to discuss a wider range of issues.

**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 essay.

**SUBJECT TUTOR C**

**General Comment**

1. This is a very satisfactory essay.

2. However, your arguments are underdeveloped by the use of the personal pronoun.

3. K. . . . is not an established authority – or not yet, anyway.

4. Avoid the use of personal 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 used this expression in the last para.
(7) This part in brackets 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. 
    some social values affect language choice too, e.g. value assigned to women, different types of work, education...
(10) Not quite: ‘needs’ more ‘technology’.

(21) No, there is no proof that ‘the intelligence and language level’ of any social group is higher or lower than any other. Some people just have less fun than others better than others.
(22) Good point. Not necessarily ‘simplifying’ here, but maybe with the times.
(23) So this one sees the other dialect has higher ‘quality’?
(24) OK, but it’s important to separate this argument from the one about language.

(25) Teaching grammar does not necessarily improve language use.
(26) Important point.
(27) You should show your use has developed by making references in the text.
(28) There are some good points here, but a lot of confusion too. I hope my notes help you write more clearly.

EAP TUTOR B

Specific Comments
(1) Puts J in the margin.
(2) Writes ‘Are you sure?’ in the margin beside a factual comment.
(3) Crosses out and rewrites.
(4) Writes ‘inconsistent 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 cross in the margin.

SUBJECT TUTOR E

General Comment
(1) It is clear that you have considered the topic seriously and you have identified and evaluated three 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 on occasions 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 are rather unfair to make the teacher be the ‘saviour’ and the ‘transgressor’ and the learner the aggrieved, innocent ‘victim’.

(6) If you are 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 respected but I wonder if you do not somewhat underestimate the extent that it is up to the teacher to establish 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 where I find it difficult to follow your logic and sometimes I feel your argument over-rely on an emotional appeal rather than an effective and considered thought.
(9) However, I suppose we all have such feelings and I feel rather charitable in putting this forward as criticism.
(10) The tricky bit is how to productively turn these feelings into plausible and acceptable action.

(11) A good starting point for more thought.

EAP TUTOR D

Specific Comments
(1) Great communication!
(2) Good, you tell your reader your intentions but the last part is vague, I think. I’d like to know a bit about your line of argument.
(3) Not sure what you mean here.
(4) Interesting! I didn’t know that.
(5) Any concrete examples?
(6) Not sure why you’re telling me this here.
(7) Why not T2?
phrased his comments explicitly as his personal view. He used the words ‘I’ and ‘me’ 21 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 would like to know...
I’m not sure what you mean by...
I don’t think I personally would...
I fear...

This seems to me to suggest that EAP tutors in our sample do not put a grade on the work to which they respond. Instead, EAP tutors will, eventually, be required to recommend a grade on the best draft, but at this point she does not want to give an indication of what grade might be. In so far as they pass judgement 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 sense 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 has no ‘ideal answer’ in terms 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 26 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...’ and ‘...to go into more detail’ (sentence 3) ‘I wanted to know more about’ (sentence 6). 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 all 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 science 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 seeing out how their tutor would answer their own question, what the tutor’s ideas, preferences and ‘observations’ are (Rimmon-Kenan 1989).

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 3, and subject tutor E’s comment 6. 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 student’s work as well 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 the content with the student, but it always reached in terms of abelief or critique of what the student has written. Her comments 4, 7, 9, 21, 23 and 25 all engage with the content of what the student has written, but they are full of indications 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 phrase ‘I wanted you...’ is used to guide us. Unders this heading we focus on the sense of thing which are particularly the prerogative of subject tutors to judge.

As noted earlier, the tutor is the arbiter of what is right. Under this heading we focus on the sense 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 has no ‘ideal answer’ in terms 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 in addition, some comments can be used 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 26 – criticism of this essay which amounts 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 D’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 or a particular place.
5. Decide on your position on sensitive 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, some 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 D’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’ ‘researching purposes in responding to student writing has a powerful shaping effect on the nature of their comments. Even though the comments in this study are not only in written form, we think that the purpose of the comments is to improve the student’s essay. One 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 apply when writing for another tutor. Subject tutor C’s advice contradicts what other tutors actually accept in the same department.
An implication of our study is that tutors do not always give a great deal of thought to whether they are attempting to achieve through their responses to students’ writing. Students are encouraged to fulfill some of the possible functions. Some are slipping from one function to another, without too much thought to the end. Looking at this from the point of view of the students on the receiving end, we do indeed wonder what they are supposed to make of it. It is not surprising that they find such responses confusing, as they do not appreciate their purposes and are unable to benefit fully from them.

The possible messages students may receive from different types of response

Tucker’s (1993) 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 flattered by brief ones. They often commented that they do not receive enough feedback, that what they get is not comprehensive enough, that it is not helpful, not logical, or not timely. Some students called for feedback to be “validated” by detailed responses, while others would have liked more support in understanding their weaknesses.

Tutors’ feedback often contains a mix of these messages, although they allow useful learning, even though it was specific to a particular piece of writing. So, while these will be strong individual differences, it is safe to assume that the majority of students value feedback, and that providing more than grades means that they have a valuable learning opportunity. Studies by Ruedelich and Swales (1988), Cohen and Cassany (1990), and Leith (1990) provide further evidence of discussion and learning.

Students’ responses to the tutors’ reactions vary, but they generally want to ensure that their work is improved. They are more likely to read the tutors’ comments and take them into account, and to become more aware of the nature and quality of their writing. They are also more likely to read the tutors’ comments and take them into account, and to become more aware of the nature and quality of their writing.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

Not only do they but they also believe that feedback messages lead to improved understanding and better mastery of the subject. They believe that feedback messages lead to improved understanding and better mastery of the subject. They believe that feedback messages lead to improved understanding and better mastery of the subject.

Messages about academic writing

The very fact that tutors grade what students have written convey messages about what the students’ writing is an object to be measured, that their writing is the only way, or at least an important way, of improving their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and that tutors have a role, rights, and responsibilities for feedback and assessment. But these need not necessarily characterize student writing. They can be used for purposes other than assessment, such as mutual communication. Communication among students and tutors, and students and peers, can show how their capabilities by other means and media. Forms of collaborative assessment can be introduced in which students have roles, rights, and responsibilities in the feedback and evaluation process.

Even written feedback is being used to assess students’ performance, the ways tutors respond to it can convey messages about its value and function:

• By giving only a grade or evaluation, as subject tutors A and D did, tutors give the firm message that it is no more than an object to be measured. This message can be counteracted by any form of response beyond a grade or evaluation.

• Focusing on form rather than content, as tutors D did, tells the message that the message is the most important feature, not the content of the message. This content is about what tutors believe is important.

• Giving general evaluative comments, as tutors E and D did, conveys the message that the message is important, not the content of the message.

Messages about university values and beliefs

Styles of response differ in messages they convey about the values and beliefs which operate within the institution. Tutors’ responses to students’ writing convey the message 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” or “our” in academic work’. Others present conventions as a matter of discipline or departmental culture — comments such as ‘In history we don’t...’ Yet others present conventions as determined by ‘neutral’ functional considerations — comments such as ‘This new area 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 the student in the academic community, ranging from a fully fledged member with authority and knowledge-making rights, to being on the margins, merely a member of the community. 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 and 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, right and wrong views — some of which are absolute. Some comments are examples of this. Indeed comments convey an objective view of knowledge. The alternative is for tutors to value and respect the individual views of students’ views, and to take their own views first. The role of the tutor is as an advocate for the values of the academic community, and as a facilitator for students to develop their own views and perspectives.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

More generally, responses can also convey ideological messages about the extent to which the institution is multinational, multicultural, or open to diversity and change. We suggest that responses which do not admit or encourage alternative conceptions and/or forms have the covert effect of valuing orthodoxy. They suggest that the institution is incompressible and unchangeable.

By contrast, responses which have matters of content 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’ development is a lot more than a ‘tool kit’. It is not just about trying to develop better time management and study skills. It is also about engaging with the feedback process.

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 need help with in writing. It needs to address their beliefs (for example, about other people’s role as educators), their values (for example, about what is worth spending time on), and their understandings (for example, about the nature of the writing process) and not just their practices. It needs to address what they do, but why they believe that they do it in that way.

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

• Give thought to the quality, quantity and timescale of feedback — how can you ensure that the staff you are working with are able to provide feedback at times when the students can use it? Possibly set fewer comments and respond to drafts as well as to final versions.

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• Evaluate comments also convey the message that tutors are arbiters of writing standards. This is just as true of positive evaluations, such as EAP tutor C’s, as is of negative evaluations. Even if tutors do have the role to take this role in relation to the feedback, they may wish in some way to establish a seminar in writing development — and this does not only apply to EAP tutors.

• Messages about university values and beliefs

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• Give thought to the quality, quantity and timescale of feedback — how can you ensure that the staff you are working with are able to provide feedback at times when the students can use it? Possibly set fewer comments 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 Iani 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 expected 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 frequent 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 Rimmer 1999):

"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 to a class activity. Rachel then presented some of the issues and outcomes to the Teaching of Writing Group. Jenny and Sue developed these into a workshop for a conference at the Communication Skills Unit, University of East London. We are grateful to the students involved, other members of the Teaching of Writing Group and colleagues in Dur 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 (Mason and Kaye 1989; Mason 1995; O'Connell 1994) 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 relationship between knowledge, language form 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 (Geeher 1994; Siiteri 1997; Lea and Street 1998). Other authors in this volume explore the notion that academic-literacy practices are central to the construction of academic knowledge (Bardham, Chapter 1; Paeth, Chapter 8; McMillan, Chapter 5; Street, Chapter 11). I draw on
a similar theoretical perspective in order to examine learning in these new environments and suggests that we need to understand more about the kinds of literacy practices that students engage with 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 is it 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 conference or not. Alternatively, tutors may set up a computer conference to provide a forum where students may discuss both academic and more general issues with other students on 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, for 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. In essence 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.

4.2.4: Philosophical Problems of Equality is a fourth-level (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 conferences, and this includes 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 of and to try out the constructions of philosophical arguments.

Students also have access to a national conference for 4.4.5 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.

H802: Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education is a rather different course to 4.4.5. 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 materials. Instead, they have access to Web-based course materials and links to other relevant Web sites. Students on this course are expected to work in small teams of other relevant Web-based course materials. Additionally, as an integral part of the course, students are required to show evidence of their use of conferencing when writing 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 multimodal 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 relationships between these two codes. It shows the conference desktop which uses the Open University's First Class Internet conference system. Students enter the tutor conference for their tutor on 4.4.5 by clicking on the appropriate icon - for example, 4.4.5 Ian's conference. 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, 4.4.5 Equality, Philosophy. The (the icon which does not appear directly on this desktop) is designed for non-academic purposes, not directly related to the substantive content of the course. Below these icons, representing different 'areas' of the course, students and tutors make their contributions. Clicking on the message icon to the left of the contributor's name enables participants to read or reply to messages (for the purposes of anonymity, the participants' names have been removed).

Figure 4.2 shows the plenary area for H802. It, too, has its own designated tutor group spaces and a plenary discussion area for general course issues; students can also contribute to the 'cafes' on more social chat issues. Notice the welcome message from one of the course tutors.

Figure 4.3 shows those created spaces which appear neutral and arbitrary, merely a place within which verbal communication can take place between students, or students and tutors. But the organization of the conference in terms of different virtual spaces and rooms has important implications 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, where, how and whom. They may choose to compose a detailed message offline or make an informal response to a post. The conferencing structure results in participants engaging in a variety of practices; these practices have implications for the kind of knowledge that is eventually recorded as a conference record, and therefore, results in knowledge being coded within 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 conference. Alternatively they may not feel confident about their postings to the tutor conference and post to the national 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 contexts that speakers normally depend upon to make sense of everyday face-to-face conversations. The spaces constructed within the conferences 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 relationships between tutors and students.

In a different context, that of spoken language, Dell Hymes's work focuses on the 'ethnography of communication'. His analysis is valuable, however, when exploring the various contexts of conferencing, and therefore, results in knowledge being coded within 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 conference. Alternatively they may not feel confident about their postings to the tutor conference and post to the national 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 contexts that speakers normally depend upon to make sense of everyday face-to-face conversations. The spaces constructed within the conferences 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 relationships between tutors and students.
be concerned with speakers' shared conceptualized knowledge of the different elements that go into making a speech act, including writing, acting, speaking, sharing, norm, function, and interaction. Persuasion, interaction, and interpersonal relations need to be considered together in the conference as a 'communicative event on-line.'

Following from Hymes, it is important to explore all the different elements of the conference, including interactions not recorded by the written transcript of the written conference message itself. We run the risk of missing this record for evidence which such records could provide. We need to examine this and this is the role of primary email exchanges between students or student to tutor, which is not recorded in the conference history. In this instance we can regard this use of one-to-one email as a literacy practice and could usefully explore the role that it might play in the learning.

Once we step into the participation in the conference as a communicative event on-line, evidence of written messages between speakers and students, and evidence of their understanding can be very helpful. In our implementation, for example, students on courses report the need to print off conference contributions so that they can highlight and annotate these written texts in ways which fece familiar to them. Additionally, students do not make immature use of the conference posting but tend to refer to the process of learning and editing texts, before the final considered 'product' is put up on the conference.

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the fact that tutors are acting as facilitators. Not surprisingly, since tutors are responsible for marking written assignments, they are well regarded as 'knowledge holders' even if these expectations are, on the face of it, not met. On the other hand, tutors are being asked to facilitate rather than to act as knowledge holders.

Work on written academic genres by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) suggests that science students often studied complex relationships of power and authority between different actors in written academic communities. These are far from static but remain shifting over time. Written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time. Educational systems of knowledge have been changing over recent years. In this context, written language can be a powerful tool in promoting understanding of the ways in which academic communities can change over time.

In contrast, in BSOT the tutors act as facilitators and their presence on the course is much more apparent. Conference contributions encourage the students to be self-reflective learners working directly with their peers. Society is the basis of setting up Activity 2. Here are the guidelines I suggest. 1. The aim of the activity is to draw on the experience of 'searching as learning.' Please read the provided guide and the online description of the activity. The guidance is: 'When or under what circumstances is searching learning?' It will be quite a challenging activity in the context of this subject, as there is a fair amount of learning to be done in order to finish the activity on time. So, I recommend we retain the same groupings as in Activity 3 of Black 1, and I will assign new roles. Here is a plan of work which has been included for people assigned to roles. Please email me if you have objections to which I have prepared. Because the conference structure is designed to be student-oriented, the written genres of the conference appear to reflect the academic content of the course: an interesting conference about learning and writing which in some ways challenges traditional academic concerns.

I am following here a similar methodological stance to previous work on academic literacy and academic written genres as evidenced in this volume (Pakulski et al., Chapter 5, Street, Chapter 11) and, therefore, make distinctions not merely between academic content but between the different written genres within which conferencing is being used for learning in students and tutors, and the different practices that are associated with these genres. Different conference genres reflect the different ways in which learning is being taken up by tutors and students within the particular conference.

Students are making use of these learning environments in their own ways, resulting in specific practices that can then be understood as different practices resulting in the production of contrasting texts. The conference sites in the two courses focused upon here enjoy very different. Academic content in terms of the subject areas and disciplinary genres that are being taught, and the nature of the written and spoken texts and students' confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it. Consistent with the ideas of BSO, academic content is more traditionally defined, with students having clear academic goals with confidence in using it.
more difficult to make. The academic content of the course and the use of the conferences for course delivery are not conceptually distinct. For example, students tend to confound these two aspects of the conference process and treat them as separate issues. This may be a result of the way in which the conference process is designed. In some cases, the conferences are seen as an opportunity for students to share their ideas and experiences, while in other cases, they are seen as an opportunity for students to receive feedback on their work. In any case, the nature of the conferences is determined by the way in which they are designed and implemented by the instructor.
Linking conferences and assessment

A novel feature of H802 is that explicit linkages are made between conference contributions and assessed written work. In this respect, then, students are expected to make conference contributions in their assignments. They are being asked to reflect upon their own understandings of the academic content and to make linkages between the written texts of the conference and the written texts that they have to compile for assessment. This is in contrast with A2E5 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 H802 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 already seen how these texts encode particular relationships between both tutors and students and students and students. Additionally, I have indicated elsewhere that 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 ways in which 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 students need to embed a very traditional academic ‘essay’ genre. Exit for H802 assessment tasks are presented in familiar ways. Despite the fact that students are being encouraged to include references to conference messages in their written work, the assignment questions are still prescribed by a traditional essay genre.

Computer conferencing is an ideal medium for collaborative learning. Discus.

likely to mean a very different form of assessment altogether — for example, students keeping their own reflective logs (see Chinn, Chapter 14) — of how their understanding of a content area has developed and changed in a process of constructive thinking to the conference. The institutional relationships of power and authority that exist between students and tutors and acknowledging that these are embedded in, among other things, present assessment practices. Becoming a ‘facilitator’ rather than a ‘teacher’ does little to alter the situation.

Exploiting some of the more obvious textual features of conference contributions to different sites in this way might, however, 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 texts of the kind there are, for example, between traditional print-based material and assessed written work. In each circumstance, students often report looking to the preparatory 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 referenced 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 record has the possibility of being a valuable record of reflection on learning, such a record does not necessarily have an immediate or obvious value for students in terms of their own learning. At the same time, neither is it perceived by students as a record of academic content in the way that they generally regard printed, referenced course material.

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 practice, 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’ reflective ability in terms of their own learning, which must include a reflective approach to academic content. There are, of course, sites such as H802 where it is more difficult to make a distinction between content and the process of reflectivity. In courses such as these, therefore, probably going to be easier to develop such an approach. In others, such as A2E5, where the academic content is more clearly delimited, 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 and using.

Discusses the following quotation from Ivan Illich (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 believe or compel the student to find the time or the will to learn; that we can provide the learner with new links to the world instead of funnelling 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... I am searching for an ‘educational net’.

Students reported that there was an artificiality about sending 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 on the conference and writing for assessment — the only linkage being between them 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 encouragement that students are making adequate use of conferencing in their learning and ultimately in their writing for assessment, maybe, as tutors we need to concentrate our efforts on understanding the relationship between the different elements of learning in these new environments:

- Understanding the specific academic content that 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 content?
- Understanding the nature of the contributions that students make to the conferences and how these embed particular commitments and understandings of academic knowledge. As tutors, recognizing the importance of these and building upon students’ understandings in their learning. This may or may not mean replicating the features of more traditional face-to-face tutorials, depending on the particular academic context.
- Being clear in their design of the environment the conference is or attempts to replicate or substitute for. We need to provide the students with ways in which they can make connections between the conferences and their assessed work. This may mean more than asking students to evidence conference contributions into written assessment. It is more
Making Performances, Making Essays: Academic Writing in the Study of Dance

Sally Mitchell, Victoria Marks, 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. So they emphasize visual and concrete elements that they think is at the heart of their practice: "They invent through the experience of moving in space... everything is to that space, to images, to music, and to other dancers within that space; the documentation of those intentions records their experience. While dance students in a university writing are confident about their own practices, with its starting point of physical movement (and its inherent elements of spatial awareness, sensitivity to physical relationships, concentration, teamwork, and an experiential approach), they are often unsure about the formal writing tasks they encounter..."

The aim of this chapter is to explore the tensions and relations between the creative, physical work of dance and the formal writing requirements of the higher education context in which such work takes place.

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 'difficult' module for first-year dance students. The study conducted here was part of a wider project, the ongoing aim of which is to improve the ability of students to conduct arguments within their disciplinary fields and in particular utilize certain written forms, such as the essay or research report. As well as exploring the technicalities of argumentation, the project has sought to understand the role of the social, institutional, pedagogical and attitudinal factors which influence staff expectations and student performance.

The study in the School of Dance looked at 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 dances 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 exploration 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 legitimate other forms of making. An analysis of a section of the essay text suggests, however, that the writing is done more as comment on the making of a dance, in fact it creates meaning which is both unique and part of a discourse (Gee 1995). 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 tasks are included with some of the more formal 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 viewers, the essay form seemed to 'fit the task in a relatively unproblematic way. In this chapter we concentrate on the writing required for the choreography course.

Sensitively 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 and negotiate time and space for rehearsal with fellow students as dancers, and to develop a dance from tentative beginnings to eventual performance. There were weekly group workshops at which the tutor introduced principles and exercises 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 writing an essay. The tutor who considered the essence of the course to be that the students should discover their voice as artists, could see no connection between the writing task and the making of a 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 she brought her expectations in line with those she attributed to the academy.

I mean when I started it I expected, what I wanted to see out of it, was a passion for that piece. And I marked all the pieces with a passion for their piece with good marks, and the others few marks and I got it all written; so now I've learnt the form to now look for, like, a good introduction, that's quite literally written as a piece... the conclusion..." It is one commonality 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 disjunction between the two. There is, for example, a certain irony in the mere assertion of giving stylistic and structural advice for writing, when it is the structure of the piece that is the subject of the advice. "Writing advice... now I've learnt the form to now look for, like, a good introduction, that's quite literally written as a piece... the conclusion..."

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The difficulty Hannah experienced was not concerned with 'beginnings, middles and endings' but with questions about the purpose of the writing, its rhetorical and epistemological orientation. These considerations relate to the ways in which the dance (which is the subject of the writing) is to be known through the writing. They also relate to the way the dance itself is thought about: Hannah sees her dance as a personal identification with the work of others; to look at other work is to connect to her own.

How to be new; how to be you

A more social perception of making dance begins to make more sense of the essay title. We read it as asking the student to make a one-off piece as dance as a successful realization of a dance as an original, of a dance that has been made and kept for the future. Why? How? Why? How? What factors have influenced the making of this dance? What is the dance 'original', which means it has to be uniquely hers, not a copy, but also to be receivable, part of the collective 'ways of doing' that constitutes the disciplines and traditions of dance. Hence she is asked to refer not only to her own dance but to the work of other choreographers. Making a claim for her dance as 'original', in a particular form of much academic writing (Kanter and Gundersen 1950), but it is also a way of explaining what gives the expression to the making of a dance. Both activities can be justified through the notion of a 'personal identity project' (Harris 1980; see also Ramsay et al., 1995; Mitchell 1995, 1999). The project can be depicted schematically as two axes—the public/private and the individual/social—which when they intersect create the quadrants. In personal identity formation the quadrants are traversed from the public/collective to the domestic direction by four types of operation: appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalization (see Figure 5.1). In terms of making a dance, the dancer student appropriates from the public, collective world of dance, knowledge and skills which feed her own peculiar making (transformation) of a dance piece. So, for instance, another of the students in our study, Lisa, described how her increasing knowledge of dance and choreographers liberated her to make dance:...

It makes you braver, I suppose... to be just you, which is a difficult thing to do. Would it feel it would be easy, wouldn't you? Just being yourself. But it's... Lisa felt able to take risks and to follow her intuition because she knew from her dance history course that this approach was already conventionalized as dance practice. The dance history was seen as a way, of course, uniquely hers, a transformation of everything that she had appropriated.

When it is performed in front of an audience, the dance work is published—this is when it really becomes complete. The work, a whole new art form (for example, in grade, whether it is chosen to be included in a university end-of-year show, and also what the student herself learns from a
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 conceptualization processes are only partially achieved through making in the act itself. Over and above this, the writing of an essay functions to legitimize the work of the student within the conventions of the academic largely text-based, institution. Another function of academic writing is to demonstrate, or to argue for, the value of something (a research or composition, a philosophical idea, a dance), where ‘necessity’ is understood, as Hare’s model suggests, not as ‘found’ or as ‘given’ to us at the point of origin. The same ‘necessity’ is understood, as Hare’s model suggests, not as ‘found’ or as ‘given’ to us at the point of origin.

The relationship between dance performance and authority. Part of the art of essay writing, then, is not so much in choosing material that is similar or related, but actually in making relations, whether through similarity or difference.

Recognizing the essentially creative component in essay writing could bring students’ perception of it closer to their perceptions of choreography. Essay writing can be a way of making meaning through the manipulation of form. When dance students leave their role as makers of dance, they need to step into the role as makers of essays. Both activities involve a making process; both also have constrained outcomes that are in some sense a commitment, a manner of how things are. The performance of a piece in front of an audience is comparable to the presentation of an essay; in final form – both actions establish a kind of closure and create a certain form of meaning.”

Exploring correspondences between writing and choreographing

A ‘dance skills’ module developed for first-year students in the School employed the correspondence between writing and choreographing as a key component. As validated, the module purported to address a wide range of topics to support the dancers’ development of physical, information technology and communication abilities. In practice, the approach was less subsequent to the institutional notion of ‘skills provision’. It was based on the premise that the confidence the students experienced in their personal and creative practice as dancers and choreographers could help to make the unaided and distance often associated with formal writing tasks. The aim was to suggest to students that the process of constructing writing shares similarities with the process of making dance. A notion of making, in the playful manipulation of form, could be understood as underlying both activities.

The module involved students in exercises that focused on organisation and design – the way things fit together or do not – as ways of generating meanings. By physically rearranging objects according to particular criteria, students were invited to think about ordering in categories, sequences and hierarchies and in patterns that spelled out the relationships of parts to a whole. On one occasion the 70 students in the group were asked to arrange themselves according to the colour of clothes they were wearing. Where white tops were sequenced in terms of coverage and elaboration – sleeveless, short sleeves, long sleeves, long sleeves and collars – elements that did not fit in the overall sequence of ‘colours’ paragraphs) had to be edited into the piece for a aesthetic reasons: the overall sequence of paragraphs’ ‘paragraphs’/ multi-colored pits incorporating all the colour ideas were ‘conclusions’. The whole was then handed out, dance, movement and play with the raw material and make their own discoveries about the way it could be shaped and sequenced as criteria emerged. The students were engaged in processes that the choreographer Laban has as necessary to the formal

of public, in explicit verbal form, its necessity, or, in Hare’s terms, its potential for conceptualization into the public/collective realm.

An extract from an essay by another student, Ellie, makes a good example of how novelty can be claimed through the writing. Her dance is entitled

This piece [Ailey’s ‘To Be or Not To Be’] is similar in structure to the second section of How Come the Sea, Ailey’s dancers begin the piece by encasing gradually on each side with their fingers the moves rather than on those around them. As more enter, the stage fills and the atmosphere picks up into a frenzy, softly moving a one of dancers-chasing in and out of smoothly timed moves and manoeuvres.

Unlike To Be or Not To Be, the actual dance steps of this piece were kept relatively simple, which allowed the use of more complex structuring in its spatial design […]

What became more and more important in the piece as it progressed, and what helped develop the use of the dance language, was the enjoyment felt by both the audience and the dancers in the process of the piece. By using a strong element of naturalism, both in the gesture of the dance and in the performance of the moves, it allowed more opportunity for real pleasure to be taken from it both by the dancers and audience, simply because they were not being put into it. Though most of the time she uses, possibly the most opposite of emotions, this is the same way in which Pina Bausch uses reality in her works. In 1986, for example, she has one dancer running, circling the stage 30 or 40 times, shouting the words ‘I’m tired’. The dancer does not have to feel any fatigue to the audience, because the genuinely is tired, and the audience do not have to allow for any kind of artistic licence to be used by the choreographer, and accept that she would be tired – they don’t have to because they know she really is exhausted.

Ellie puts her piece into dialogue with the other pieces she has selected. She shows, for example, how Ailey’s work is both ‘like’ and ‘Unlike’ her own. She abstracts from details of the work to stress the primary common ones: similarities in terms of ‘naturalism’ it works by. She has used the same principle in her own work, she says, though with the ‘most opposite of emotions’. In making these moves, Ellie is arguing for her dance and its conceptualization within the field (Todara 1990) of dance. By ‘set ting’ we mean the making of choices or statements based on evidence (grounds) that can be justified (warranted) by references to a rule, principle or authority (see Toulmin et al. 1984). Evidence in this case is supplied by description of the dances. Justification comes through the articulation of rules (‘if dancers feel a certain strong emotion, the audience will recognize that emotion if it is communicated by the dancer’ and by invoking authority (‘a technique used by Bausch, who is recognized as a highly talented choreographer, is likely to be a good one too’). Those moves are made directly to the audience, in a strong sense in which Ellie is not reporting, but constructing her justifications.

Publication, Making Essays
What we know of the difficulties experienced by students writing for the choreography course bears out this comment: help was needed not only with general essay-writing skills, but in addressing the particular requirements of the writing task, its epistemological and institutional purpose as well as its relation to the making of the dance. The student's comment is also a reminder that exams are not the only text required in the higher education context: developing an argument across the 10,000 words of a dissertation is a new challenge altogether.

Some of the group also felt that the module should have been optional, especially for those who saw themselves as already confident writers and group participants when they arrived (most of these were mature students). Some felt it was too basic and unchallenging, reinforcing a stereotype they rejected: who can do it but not think.

Although a number of students felt liberated by the opportunity to discuss their formal writing with others from the ballet (and, of course, wanted any writing support to come from tutors within their own disciplinary community), they admired their own successes in writing to the help of a tutor who was a dancer, but who also represented academic authority in an intense way 'because she writes books'. From their descriptions, this tutor seemed to treat the two practices of choreography and writing as quite separate activities. Discussions with her had, these students claimed, never reached on the shared process of creative construction in the making of writing and the making of the dance - a reminder that it is quite possible for dance students to become successful writers without recourse to any analogous with dance.

Despite this, however, we want to propose in claiming some value in expressing the correspondences between the two activities. For many students, overcoming resistance to the idea of writing is the biggest hurdle. This is also recognized by the tutor in the critical studies course who devotes at least two seminars to detailed, rather technical, discussion of what essay writing involves. At times, she acknowledges, her clear explanations can be counterproductive:

"They worry tremendously about the writing. And I think that sadly they see it as a different kind of activity from what we've been doing all the sessions (discussion of videos of dance performances), ... They see it as a different kind of activity which is somehow distanced from them. They somehow put to a different kind of hat, if you like, and engage in something which is alien. And it's very difficult for some to derive any link between helping them with their work, focusing on it, as you know."

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the staff and students of the School of Dance: All student names have been changed. Thanks too, to the Leverhulme Trust who are funding the project 'Improving the Quality of Argument in Higher Education' at Middlesex University during 1995-98. This chapter is based on a paper at the conference of the Humanities and Arts Higher Education Network on 12 October 1996, and published in conference proceedings.

Notes

1. The project is entitled 'Improving the Quality of Argument in Higher Education'. It is funded by the Leverhulme Trust and based at Middlesex University (1995-99, see Mitchell, 1996).

2. It is this that makes the timing of the essay important. In our study we found that, depending upon when their performances were scheduled, some students were required to hand in their essays before their dancers had reached completion. However, the students were unaware of this situation at the time they handed in their first drafts and had completed the first week of a 3-4 week cycle.

3. This list 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, use analogies and reference to routines). These approaches, she claims, lead to easy adaptation to new contexts and to avoid unnecessary text - ask questions, take notes, discuss various points of view, write descriptive prose, review and feed back.

4. Sally Mitchel, Victoria Mark Fisher, Lynne Hall and Judith Harding engage in discussion about why they are being asked to write in this way. This would involve on the part of each staff member to be theoretical and, possibly, political, that is to talk about writing on a broad level. Our discussion in this chapter of the 'personal identity project', of necessity and of argument in relation to the choreography essay may provide suggestions as to how such talk might be focused.

5. Finally, all the above points come together in an expressed desire for subject-specific tutors, that is, for support integrated with students' own disciplinary study. Although many students do value the freedom from judgement that having two tutors from other disciplines bestows, there is clearly a need to engage subject tutors in staff 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 implications 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.

6. phyllis creene

The 'Personal' in University Writing: Uses of Reflective Learning Journals

In there a place and space for the expression of the 'personal', and is it relevant in higher education? This paper sets out to examine the uses and contexts of journals 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 as students in higher education, as well as for their tutors who may have various and sometimes conflicting models of their task as teachers. In this chapter I compare the different meanings attached to the notion of the 'personal' in the context of learning journals used in a disciplinary and an interdisciplinary course. By 'learning journal' I refer to a variety of names usually called, for instance, 'reflective journals', 'study diaries' 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' processes 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 status of the personal in student academic writing.

The problematic nature of an apparently rather innocuous suggestion to students to make one 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 anthropology faculty at Sussex University. The research was funded by a U.K. Higher Education Funding Council 'Teaching and Learning Development' project administrated by the National Network for Teaching and Learning Anthropology in 1995-98. The study was designed to look at the impact on student learning of the new forms of writing, all of which can 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: a second-year, core political anthropology course, and an option on a first-year, interdisciplinary critical reading course, on the topic of 'death'. The death course included the use of journals in class, and was designed and taught by a member of the social anthropology 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 rationales for the introduction of the journals and how they were used. I was also looking at the way the journal was written and the students' written responses to what they were reading. My interest was in the ways that the writing process and students' personal experiences in the discipline-situated, and in the interdiscourse, which brought some of the different understandings and beliefs of the students and the teacher together. I aimed to show, for example, that although the 'personal' was defined, constructed and experienced in different ways, the very fact that it came up as an issue during this research demonstrated that the new forms of writing gave students an opportunity to define for themselves their own pathways within their university courses that many valued highly.

Benefits of the use of learning journals

The research indicated that writing learning journals had the potential to significantly enhance and develop the depth and range of student 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 in the extent to which the journals were integrated 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, journal writers perceived the opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing fluency. It is a theme of this book that writing is a major means by which students construct their disciplinary knowledge. The idea that writing discourse, rhetorical and at length helps students understand and build up a conceptual base recalls Peters Elbow's (1981) work on 'free writing': getting students to write without stopping in a way of 'tapping up the writing process' has been proved effective in helping students to develop their students' own pathways in a discipline, rather than to surface their ideas in a way that students are often expected to do for many years. Writing learning journals is not necessarily about 'free writing', particularly when they are written in public documents, but it certainly has as much of that flavour than the usual work that students do in universities: 'it flows more easily', as many students put it. In making students keep a regular learning journal, uses foregrounded the idea of writing as a process and a tool for learning rather than as a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge. As a token put it, a major purpose 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 nurses gave for introducing learning journals was that they asked students 'to make connections' between ideas within the course and themes concerning the students' own views about their writing. Discursive writing is often more effective than, for example, seminar discussion because it can be a cumulative and progressive process of meaning-making that produces a stable, substantial record which can be utilized and, as appropriate, supplemented. Regular writing, therefore, enables the students to construct connections and patterns that cannot be formulated in any other form, such as talking or memory. It allows her to become her own reader of work in writing, and to re-read her writing as a means to try to trace the developments in her learning from an outsider's perspective.

Third, writing journals encouraged students to think reflectively. Research into academic writing shows how prescribed forms of writing are intrinsically bound up with the construction of knowledge of a discipline, how students in a discipline and how they determine the sense of thinking a subject. As Bauman (1988): 111 puts it: 'The problem of choosing which words to write and where to look towards a whole world rather than into a contained technology.' For the students I worked with, the front line of their 'whole world' was represented as a general consensus as to what kind of writing experience they had been given, how they were asked to be. A student was invited to what an essay 'contains' included the structure, factual evidence, background information, identification and examination of the idea, and references and bibliography. The essay needs to have a 'logical flow' which 'takes across argument from point to point. They would need to use argument as a signpost to the reader. In the end the essay is about 'writing to come up in different guises in different places — for example, in tutors' discussions around anthropology as a discipline, and in descriptions about the new forms of writing which offered students different and sometimes contradictory messages about what was considered the 'right' way to write. It is clear that it is not easy to trace the developments in her learning from an outsider's perspective.

The discipline: the 'personal' and 'reflectivity'

The introduction of the new forms of writing was related to a continuing discipline-based debate about the status of the researcher and of writing within this discipline. This is an area of anthropology (for example, see Clifford and Marcus 1986). The contested notion of the 'personal' in both anthropology research and education was therefore a controversial model running through the study.
and is its own autobiographical, new forms of writing can enable students to make no kind of connections between their lives, their courses, the texts
they are reading and even some fragmentary, perhaps new personal
understanding of their own. This reflection should implicate
both socio-cultural and social science components...

The development of the students' own voice as scholars' and terms such (McHargh 1998; emphasis added)

On the development of the students' 'own voice as scholars' and terms such as 'originality', 'individuality' and 'creativity', which were also the subject of this 'loose debate', the report points to a mismatch between students' understandings of 'originality' as the 'act of personal knowledge' and anthropo-
logists' notions that this would be 'freely anchored within intellectual debate'. This brings to the fore how ideas of the personal are converted, in this case between tutors and students, who were concerned to express their 'own opinions'. The following statement in the report demonstr-
ates how it is the tutor, as the representative of the discipline, who has the power to make decisions about what goes into student writing and what ways out.

A 'creative' or 'individual' essay essay identifies new connections or original insight and thereby introduces new arguments to the debate. Such argument cannot be forged from purely personal opinions or individual experience alone.

(McHargh 1998)

I have quoted this report at length because it painlessly very clearly to the difficulties students can have in negotiating discipline-driven terms, and because, within this framework, it makes a judgement as to how students' personal experiences might be relevant -- or not -- in an anthropology course. The report reflects the difficulties that an impact on the tutors' attitudes to their students' writing, and in turn influenced the students' approach.

The 'personal' of the term in personal terms is a given by Gluck (1998), who points to a way of considering the (student) writer's 'iden-
tity' in different settings and for different writing 'selves': the 'autobiographical self', comprising the identity the writer brings to an act of writing; the 'authorial self', which is the writer's authority and control of the text the writer writes, and the 'discursive self, which is 'launched' in the genre and linguistic features of the text itself. Brand describes some of these discernible characteristics of 'academic' writing that appear in students' essays, such as monoglossialism and abstraction, and, on a broader textual level, the presentation of a case and the questioning of the arguments. The adap-
tation of these features in academic writing positions the writer into taking on particular ways of knowing and thinking that do not invite personal

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The Record of Study

The political anthropology coursework includes the Record of Study in the following way:

The Record of Study is a summary of the reading and other research you have carried out on the course along with notes on your views of the material you have encountered in the reading in the seminars, and the lectures. It is a kind of history of the work you have done on the course. It is a Record of what you have read and how your ideas have changed...

It is designed to encourage reflectivity about your own learning.

It is a record of all aspects of the course -- lectures as well as the reading.

This indicates how the Record of Study was intended to reflect its title: it may be that the notes are expressed in ways consistent to the students' understanding of the concepts presented in the course -- concepts that themselves changed and were corrected over time, in accordance with chang-
ing theoretical positions. The tutors' thinking in introducing the Record of Study are more clearly in an interview I had with the course convenor.

We wanted students to start their records of study with a statement about what they expected of the course, and what their first under-
standing was of concepts like politics and power, then to keep this record of study up to date at least every two weeks. Through that we wanted them to see that their own understandings of these concepts running through the course were evolving. (We expected that) this would give them some sense of achievement, some sense of confi-
dence in their own learning and also provide a vehicle for reflecting and connecting similar arguments found in different contexts and see-
ning that there was some cumulative aspect to their learning. Finally, we wanted them to be reflective in another sense, in that they could incor-
porate references from their own personal experience into the record of study showing that their understanding had evolved through engage-
ment with the analytical issues which the course was dealing with.

What this seems to be promoting is the idea of the student as thinker and opinionator, trying to grasp new ideas, and as a 'reader' who thinks about her own position with regard to the course material. In this context the personal is to do with the students' intellectual stance and their social/ political identities. These aims of the journal were to enable them to bring this identity into a relation with the course material. The fact that some stu-
dents had a more clearly defined sense of this identity than others had an impact on their recordings and effectively they were able to take on the task of writing the records of study, as a number explained to me in discussion. Here is an extract from one record of study.

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knowledge or experience. In these terms, the question for my purposes here is how far the introduction of different forms of writing made a difference to the 'writing self'. The purpose of learning journals may be to introduce the writer's autobiographical selves (for these are multiple) into the texts that students write at university as a way of facilitating the development of the authorial self. Another way of putting this is that different forms of writing expand the range of the discursive self that students can assume, and that the more personal discourse of the journal courses the transition to the adoption of the new autobiographical self involved in being a university student.

Different courses, different journals

These issues surround the different meanings of the personal in the new forms of writing emerged in a focused way in my study of the two courses on political anthropology and death. I do not want to suggest too great a differ-
ence between the aims of the new writing on the two courses, for they had much in common in their intention of engaging students with the material. Nevertheless, the differences were marked and had important effects on the students' writing.

The 'new writing' on the two courses had different titles that rather nearly reflected these different purposes as the tutors saw them. In the Record of Study and the Death Journal, the second-year political anthropology course was seen as an important theoretical foundation to the final-year options that demanded a greater degree of independent work on the part of the course than the course had done so far. It was here that the process towards helping the student to think like an anthropologist (as the aims of the degree had been expressed) required them to come to fruition -- tutors spoke of qualitative shifts in student work at this point. The death course was seen as foundational in a different sense: as an introductory/tribal class in 'critical reading'. In the first term of the first year of the degree, the death course was intended to introduce students to academic practices, which also involved a shift in students' conceptual positions. Making use of the 'personal' form of writing had different meanings according to the different values and episte-
mological frameworks of the disciplinespecific and the interdisciplinary

course. To some extent -- as a course taught by a social anthropologist -- these differences were also a function of the death course's status as the first writing course to begin the year in which the tutors discussed them, as I consider later. The Record of Study was seen as a way of using the personal to develop students' anthropological understanding, whereas the Death Journal, set within the interdisciplinary course, gave more scope for exploration of the personal -- the student's 'autobi-
ographical self' -- in its own right.

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We had great difficulty in defining what a society was and weren't, for example, whether travelers were part of our society or whether they had their own. This is how the famous bubble theory was born -- maybe an individual can be part of a 'subculture' or 'sub society' within a much larger society structure (a small bubble inside a much larger one)......

... one of the problems I have is concentrating on the subject. I tend to wander off at times (maybe you've noticed that in my record of study here!) although my marks on the whole have been very good.

So I suppose having to write a 1,000 word piece on a pretty side subject forced me to either relevant information, group similar and opposing concepts and avoid wading off.

The writer is 'taking through' his thinking about the ideas presented in the course, which is interpreted with comments about his way of studying and doing the assignments, his attitudes to the readings and to the course generally. In the first paragraph he expresses possibilities and doubts about terms, and in the process reveals a definition of the 'bubble theory' which is encapsulated in his image of the bubble inside a 'larger' one.

The aims and assumptions of this core anthropology course, as expressed both in the course counselor's words and the subject group's comments, are rather to retard or retardify oneself, as it particularly stressed students' conceptual development. This was demonstrated in the essay that this student did not seem generally about his own life experiences; rather, the relevant (personal) experience in this context is the course-specific process of reading, seminars, reflecting and writing pieces for assessment. The autobiographical self, to use Horne's terminology, that comes through in this writing is that of air engaged student of the course. Even the name of this self is recorded in terms of studying and learning in the passage about the writer's problem in 'concentrating on the subject'. The course also demonstrates a confident authorial self -- the writer's sense of authority -- which is expressed, for example, in the slightly plural use of language in his own framing of the fragment of the bubble theory, and the almost intimate address to the reader (you too) 'maybe you've noticed that I tend to wander off the point'. The difference between this writing and the way students and tutors perceived it, is that the writer is more able to bring in aspects of an autobiographical self to this context, and therefore is able of the different kind of writing, create a kind of discursive self. He is writing differently in a way that can be seen in his reactions to what goes on as well as to the course material and with a confident sense of an authorial presence in his study.

The Death Journal

The critical reading course in the School of Cultural and Community Stud-
ies, of which the death course was one option, was designed to enable
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 issues or problems. The course aims to introduce students to a range of themes central to the School... It works 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 unt: 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... artistic work... a "scribbled" format was suggested.

consider contemporary issues surrounding death and their own thoughts on this.

reflect on "personal" encounters with death or dying.

reflect on assigned readings.

"read across" texts... make links between different readings on the course. The journal's shape, context 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/mine's approach. She referred a number of times in the seminars to her belief in the need for a writer (in this case a researching anthropologist) to acknowledge her own subjectivity and her own presence in a research project. At the same time, her presence 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 you to do is to challenge, deconstruct, to challenge common-sense views about there being a single and right way to do things and getting to realize there are all kinds of ways... and I see that as a necessary step to a critical perspective.

I ask them to think about the different writing genres... I try to encourage people to read beyond the individual text to get some of the experience of the writer that they might not be aware of in their normal framework, that she would not have introduced herself, and that would not have appeared in any sociology or anthropology course.

The relatively free-flowing structure of the seminars was reflected in and consistent with the requirements of the journals, which also allowed for the 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 ruled out the personal nor allowed it to dominate. Personal thinking and experience were seen as valid in the academic setting - not just as a means to a "different" 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 topics in the 1970s death journal 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."

"Reflections on death."

"Writing during life."

"Writing as an afterlife."

"Writing in the future."

"Writing during their education."

"Writing as a therapeutic tool."

"Writing as an expression of the writer's self."
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 in as a "legitimate" part of the teaching and learning setting.
Since death is, as the rubric 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 course through their
studying 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 stu-
dent. By asking students to write differently, the journals allowed them to
think differently. In this way the new forms of writing have a potential not
only for enhancing student learning but also for expanding tutor and stu-
dent 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 demon-
strate 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 pur-
  poses of the course?
- How will they be integrated into the teaching, learning and assessment
  process?
- How much "freedom" do the journals allow students in practice to negoti-
  ate 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 creativi

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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 qualifica-
tion. Schoolteaching provides an obvious example, and initial teacher training at the postgraduate level is the immediate context within which stu-
dents writing is considered in this chapter. To be more specific, the writing to which I shall be referring was produced by students on the one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course. As the course leader’s indicators, the students already held 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 to 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 may also encompass, to some extent, those undergraduate courses which are held 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 cite 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 analytical evaluations which theory and practice currently tend to generate—the ‘theoretical’ and the ‘methodological’; the ‘fictional’ and the ‘immaterial’; the ‘abstract’ and the ‘concrete’. Practice as 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 remitted in forms which derive at least some of their creative power from that derogated cultural myth of the ‘lively user’ in which reflection is held to be a nebulous and inadequate substance 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-swallowing 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 partnership arrangements whereby student teachers spend months
time 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 (Wink 1996: 174). Like most teacher trainers, Carson (1995: 151) defends this focus against its critics: ‘Reflective practice does eschew an attitude of 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. As one interviewee has noted, it becomes the teacher education that, as Carson (1995: 151) himself has commented, it tends to be no more than an empty diet.

The phrase reflective practice has been abroad in the land. So much so that student teachers will roll their eyes at the mere mention of the ‘R’ word. Suddenly 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 carries important pedagogic implications 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 ownership of their knowledge. I shall shortly indicate, this entails questions of identity and subjectivity.

New concerns here, however, led to new conceptions of the kind of agency, and so of agent, which the PGCE course should foster. In order to lead those new conceptions validity in their relation to PGCE student writing, I next provide a contrasting background in the form of a brief discussion of PGCE student writing in the early 1990s. I have my comments on a study which I carried out in my role as a PGCE tutor on the ‘education component’, as it was then called.

A brief retrospective

Before the introduction of formal partnerships between schools and institutions of higher education, PGCE students were offered few written guidelines concerning the assignments they had to produce for assess-
ment purposes. The main requirement was that they should relate theory to practice in an ‘enquiry’. This specification had as its implicit corollary an idealized identity for the teacher trainee. The PGCE student was assumed to be an active and independent learner who would benefit from con-
siderable freedom to pursue her own particular areas of interest—this being regarded as the pathway to the development of her identity as an active, creative and autonomous practitioner, her agency. In other words, the student writer was expected to present those dispositions which progressive pedagogy advocated for her to foster in learners in school.

This perception of ‘learner as active and autonomous constructor of knowl-
edge’ converged with a view of writing which reached back to the Romantic period and emphasized creativity and individual expressiveness in meaning-
making.

The final assessment of the students’ assignments was consistent with
this emphasis. Though the presence of minimal criteria might seem to allow students a number of possibilities, the assignments which were included high marks were usually strongly interpretative in their orientation. To be more specific, the students tended to follow the same basic pattern in which the first part of the theory was turned out in the form of concrete data such as vignettes from classrooms, or transcripts of recorded talk, or excerpts from policy documents. Consequently, though the assignments referred to as ‘enquiries’, the most successful tended to be more like essays in which the students used theory in order to develop an individually distinctive and personally relevant perspective on some aspect of educational practice. It was, furthermore, a perspective which avoided simplistic conclusions instead it showed an awareness of complexity and an abolition from easy answers.

The examiners’ comments on the highly rated assignments added an
other dimension to this emphasis on individual and personally relevant meaning-making. The assignments were treated as if they were narratives of the writer’s subjectivity—a subjectivity regarded implicitly, if not explicitly, as constituting the trainee teacher’s ideal identity and the source of her agency in the classroom. The examiners referred, for example, to students’ ‘immediacy of understanding’, and to their being ‘sensitive and knowledgeable’, ‘imaginative’ and ‘insightful’. There were some references to tradi-
tional academic criteria such as ‘this is a cogent argument’, ‘there is evidence of wide reading’. Such criteria were, however, usually shaped into personal qualities—for example:

he demonstrates an ability to synthesize, compare, sustain an argument with evidence of originality.

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A particularly graphic illustration of the extent to which an assignment could become idealized with the individual who wrote it is provided by the following examiner’s comment:

This is clearly an enthusiastic and hardworking student with consider-
able imagination and promise who should do well in her future career.

This tendency to treat the students’ texts as indices of their identity is problematic. However, the problem should not be seen as deriving solely from a possible mismatch between the qualities suggested by an individual student’s assignment and those the student might be expected to demonstrate in the classroom. Such an explanation is only as relevant as the borderline between classroom and assignment, it is not an answer to the question of the writer’s subjectivity—what must now be questioned, since it would reinforce certain assumptions concerning the student’s subjugation—assumptions which can be best summarized in the way of Boudon’s (1995: 56) characterization of ‘competence’: this identify the latter with an ‘efficient, creative and autonomous’ identity—

‘Competence’, as thus described, serves to make visible the alliance that was being forged on the PGCE course between, on the one hand, progressive views of the learner, and, on the other, the view of student writing as the expression of inner capacities implicitly regarded as the source of a teacher’s agency in the classroom. Thus the examination helps in its turn to bring into being, and so to express, or to insist, what has been edited out—any suggestion that writing does not come naturally even at the postgraduate level. Once we adopt to address that omission and so begin to focus on student writing as pertaining to the identity of the teacher, we see increas-
ably confronted with issues relating to language. I do not, however, restrict language in this context to its lexical and grammatical form. For me the PGCE student had difficulties of that kind. In fact most of them were more of experience and skilled academic writers. My focus is rather on a student assignment as a text being shaped by the writer; in short, as in an example of written discourse (Bawman 1991). 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 in its own tensions and problems.

A 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
especially those with degrees in English, tended to obtain higher grades than did science or maths graduates. This is not surprising, since the students could transfer to classes in schools and the kind of close interpretation-reading with which they were already familiar.

The recognition of how the guidelines assignment advantaged some students while disadvantaging others was one factor which led to the development of a more specific, more detailed guideline. However, as I shall indicate below, the introduction of the mandatory requirement that tutor-trainer teams spend two-thirds of their time in schools was a more immediately pressing influence: teachers in schools were to be involved in advising students on their professional studies assignments. Because they did not have a shared understanding of what was expected of students, a more detailed and explicit specification was required. Adopting an even wider perspective, I see a possible link between the more detailed character of the new guidelines and a change in the general perception of learners and learning in higher education. The new guidelines can be said to reflect a growing emphasis in UK universities on the importance of pedagogy - an emphasis which has led to an insistence that assessment criteria be made explicit to students. A selective plundering of Bernstein’s (1971) theories once again helps me to crystallize this change of form: ‘pedagogy’, a term which subsumes ‘specialised output’ and the ‘explicit rules for regulating them’, has replaced ‘competence’. To put it another way, by drawing on the current government-oriented language of teacher training ‘competence’ has been used to ‘competenceorientation’ of the programme. This programme is currently based on the recognition that a teacher is engaged in a wide variety of educational aims and objectives between those administered within curriculum areas. Learners and tutors thus cover cross-curricular topics such as the history of the education system, language and language learning, prevailing learning and differentiating in accordance with the aims of partnership between schools and the higher education institution in which training is being conducted. The regulations for those areas of teaching are at present required to carry out a ‘schooled’ aspect as well as a ‘research and development’ project under the supervision of teachers in their placement schools, those areas being partly intended as a contribution to the school on the part of the beginning teacher. The questions or problems to be addressed are decided in consultation with the teachers, but the assessment criteria are provided by the training institute. These criteria are designed to indicate the ‘public’ aspects of postgraduate teacher training, an aim which I shall comment on later. Students have to relate theory to practice, construct an argument, appreciate the usefulness and limitations of their research methods and assess the value of their research. The two pieces of writing

object under study, the literature on the field: the anticipated audience and the writer’s own self. Burrell was analyzing papers by well-known academics (J. K. Watson and S. L. Clark, Robert K. Merton, and Geoffrey H. Hartman), who were intent on preventing new knowledge, but the difference between professional academic writers and students is actually an advantage in this sense in that it brings into relief the particular contexts of the student’s situation as writers. In other words, as this reference to student thinkers indicates, I seek to avoid the Romantic view of the writer which I outlined above and associated with ‘competence’. In place of the duality, the creative individual whose writing is valued as the expression of personal qualities or dispositions, I propose a text in which the writer is primary visible in the connection it makes with, and between, the object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader (c).

In Burrell’s page the four contexts both impose a coherence on the three examples of academic discourse which he discusses, and exemplify the differences in meaning-making of the three texts. The ‘object under study’ - the structure of DNA, the ambivalence of science, and Weatherstone’s later poems - are represented in terms of their modality: DNA is an object that exists in the world; the ambivalence of science is, however, a concept which is represented (argued for); and Weatherstone’s later poems are the meditations of Hartman’s ‘subjective recreation of the poetic moment’. It is from these differences in the ‘subject under study’ that Burrell largely derives his account of the differences in the other contexts. The use of the literature of the field and the role of the anticipated audience (in this case the writer’s peers) is more difficult to see, but it is regarded as accepted knowledge in each case. Thus Clark and Watson do not need to rehearse the literature relating DNA but only that concerning its structure, while Weatherstone has to show that ambivalence is significant not just from the literature the scientific perspective. Had weatherstone, for example, had detailed his argument using the pedagogic corollary of this view of knowledge and its implications for the scientific community in the article which he presents can promote learning by

(1) In the case of the research and development project, usually do become the basis of the professional studies assignments which the beginning teachers submit in their third year of training. The trainees are now given detailed written guidelines which break down the research-based enquiries and research and development projects into component parts. The following excerpt from the abstract of one beginning teacher’s final project indicates the pattern that frequently results:

The first section deals with the formulation of the investigation, it begins by posing the main question of the study . . . and why it is important . . . The second section explains the methods employed to obtain information and examines the findings of the investigation . . . The third section . . . seeks to discuss . . . what strategies could be employed to remedy the situation, and the degree of support for them . . . The fourth section includes an appraisal of the limitations of the data . . . and the methods used to obtain information.

In short, the guidelines offered to students represent a move towards ‘performance’, that is, towards ‘specialised output’ requiring ‘specialised skills’ and ‘explicit rules of realization’ (Bernstein 1984). In this instance, a successful display of ‘performance’ requires the student to adopt an empirical, positivistic view of a ‘research’ - a view which the training institutes characterised with ‘postgraduateism’. In practice, this research paradigm can lead to a rather mechanistic application of the theories in use, almost the beginning with a few generalizations about the limitations of questionnaires or interviews (generalizations which could be found in any textbook on research methods), and then tagging on brief summaries of vaguely relevant theories. This is but a demonstration of ‘postgraduateism’. If ‘postgraduateism’ is intended to mean an understanding of research paradigms and the importance of ‘methodological integrity’ (Booth and Boding 1982), more, in practice, most assignments use the guidelines less strictly and in a way which takes the students’ individual interpretations of the relationship between theory and practice - largely shaped by the students’ marks, the tutors’ marks, which are based on the students’ mark of the partnership between training institution and school. In the next part of this chapter I analyse in detail the Burrell’s argument as an illustration of different approaches and which together show how two beginning teachers position themselves in relation to the competing discourses of competence and performance. This is, in relation to the institutionalized and deeply evident protocols of their perception of their agency in the classroom.

A framework for analysing students’ written texts

I have used the four interrelated contexts which Barrowman (1981) identified as shaping written academic discourse. These contexts are the:
The need to know has to be created cooperatively by teachers and students in ways that are personally meaningful to learners. This reality is a tall order for beginning teachers.

This positioning of herself in relation to experienced teachers is a theme that keeps repeating. However, what it serves to conceal is the actual nature of A's problem. While the being experienced will no doubt be of immense professional expertise, I would suggest that her difficulties currently derive from confusing identities which turn on a conflict between competence and performance. On the one hand, she endorses competence-oriented discourses which locate agency in an empowering personal meaning-making (in so far as we may assume that her meaning-making is of the discursive kind); on the other, she is also a practising teacher encountering performance-oriented discourses which may demand of her a radical redefinition of her identity as a practitioner. Thus, the very notion of ‘teacher identity’ needs to be rethought and redeployed.

The need to know how to teach is not the same as the need to know what to teach. This is a critical distinction which has implications for A’s identity as knowledge. For example, she needs to know what the repertoire of teaching strategies available to her for the task in question is, and what the implications of those strategies are for her students. Thus, her professional identity as a teacher needs to be redefined in ways that are personally meaningful to her.

Beginning teacher A’s assignment

Beginning teacher A experienced the same dual disorientations as beginning teacher B, but handled them differently in her assignment. Whereas A is primarily concerned with the application of teaching strategies and warm practice to her own class, B concentrates on practice in general. In practice, she implicitly, and almost immediately, presents practice as more ‘real’ than theory. Thus, the ‘object under study’ is initially ‘differentiation targeting different abilities’; the meaning of this concept is dealt with briefly — a definition comes from Capel (1995) soon getting it out of the way.

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, I turn finally to issues of pedagogy which rest on any selective borrowing and reconceptualizing of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’. It is far from clear that it is identified with an ‘ethical community’, ‘competence’ can imply that writing cannot be taught. ‘Performance’, on the other hand, suggests that all aspects of writing can be acquired in explicit, ‘rules of writing’ or ‘transferable skills’. A further need is to question the concepts of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ (Bernstein 1984) on the teacher’s agency. B identifies agency in the classroom with an exclusive, performance-oriented emphasis on what is possible within a partial paradigm.

Example of a question: e.g. the question of ‘what is mixed ability’ and ‘What is differentiation’, and then provides the answers.

The discussion above has already suggested, the image of the teacher’s “self” which emerges from B’s assignment is primarily that of an apprenticeship to the teacher as the secondary concern in the classroom learning of the pupil. It takes into account prior learning and the characteristics of the individual. (Capel et al. 1995: 121)

Having thus disposed of problems of definition, B turns to her primary object of study, ‘differentiation’, as to a concept but as a practice. Keeping in mind that B investigates the extent to which differentiation is in place in the school where she is teaching. Having established that it is a fact a school policy which is implemented in most classes, she arrives at her main argument, ‘teachers bad behaviour’. Following the pattern of research presented in the guidance guidelines, she then frames a question:

To what extent can differentiation targeting ability and learning styles improve pupil behaviour?

This question suggests that the object under study derives from anxieties relating to her assigned experience in the classroom either as an observer or as a teacher.

The emphasis on practice also influences her choices of relevant literature. She chooses texts which she sees as having a direct bearing on her empirical question. Furthermore, she places what she takes from her reading alongside the comments of members of staff whom she interviews, treating the written sources as similar in kind — both are open to question. This is strongly indicated in her choice of reporting verbs coupled with a personal subject for example, ‘Garthoff proposes’, ‘she (a support teacher) believes’, ‘Topping claims’, ‘according to Reid et al’. However, in referring to her own research, she draws on a paradigmatic paradigm, mirroring the status of the real and certain to her results and conclusions. She ‘discovers’, that ‘the teacher produces findings’. She refers to responding to Garthoff’s theory of multiple intelligences with enthusiasm, and declares that she will not abandon her theory in the future, though she has been strongly criticized. She is, however, no disciple who states that she will ‘differentiate’ the theory to the test in the future, using a larger, more carefully selected sample of students. She thus indicates once again that, holding ontological views of theory is seamless practice. However, she assumes that it can only do it if large-scale experimental research, even rarefied, quantitative methods. This assumption can be made to place the teacher’s agency firmly within ‘performance’ as defined by Bernstein (1993) agency now depends on having the specialized research skills which will enable specialist output — findings which can be applied in different contexts. It is with A, who would approach primary for herself. B can be regarded as her main advantage as the teachers in the partnership school. She acts as an informer, as is evident in her didactic mode of presentation.
A Question of Attribution: The Indeterminacy of 'Learning from Experience'

Simon Purdie

Introduction

Reading and marking seem that students have written can be a disheartening 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 discipline's 'truths' shared quite as widely or equally among students. The difficulty is that such criteria, and accompanying tests so that 'something should be done', are 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 insights and ways forward, is one of the key challenges for writing research.

What is frustration about researching student writing as a participant observer is the opportunity to trace students' talk around their writing, and accounts of their writing. In this role, 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 'failing', 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' texts.

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 Shumway (1977) the students' unsuccessful texts potentially...
the discipline, or may assume it has broader significance for all academic writing. Without guidance, they may sometimes appear to "fill in" what they have learned elsewhere, and at 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'. For example, even in school, physics students may measure the gravitational pull of the earth for 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/s^2 (as it is recognised to be), they have to attribute this result to their own inaccurate measurement or limited equipment and time. In other words, they have to attribute their result to the constraints in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity.

The point is that this kind of learning, and the basis for it, may never be explicitly discussed. Through recording teacher-student and student-student conversations in science classes (Carnegie, Edelson and Mayo 1987) and others 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 insufficiency 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" (Edelson and Marcus 1987: 124). The implication is that students learn to attribute significance and insufficiency to their measurements, often attempting 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 evidences.)

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 the entire course content by 'finding things out for themselves', by doing experiments, by 'discovering'. For example, it was noted in school, physics students may measure the gravitational pull of the earth for 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/s^2 (as it is recognised to be), they have to attribute this result to their own inaccurate measurement or limited equipment and time. In other words, they have to attribute their result to the constraints in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity.

Within science research

Within science research, attribution is also required of scientists themselves. One of the key observations in sociological studies of the construction of scientific knowledge is in the ways in which research scientists, in doing research, have to attribute variations in their results either to the experiment or to nature. They have to ask whether a particular result, which may be different from what they had expected, is due to experimental problems or is actually telling them something new about the universe, or what other factors are the experimenters with. This is a process of assigning significance to the observation or experience (see Figure 8.2).

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, writing 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 learning professional practices from particular experiences. Yet aspects of these particular experiences may not illustrate the intended professional practices. They may equally represent practices that are particular to the company or institution, or particular to a single case. Moreover, rather than representing the aims or ideals of the profession, they may represent the responses of professional practices to certain constraints of time and resources. I show this in Figure 8.3.

Without guidance in understanding the significance of their experiences, the learner may attribute an experience in ways that are context dependent from the understandings of their employer. Moreover, their attribution of the experience has implications for their developing understanding of the profession. It has implications for whether they will repeat or modify particular decisions and actions in a subsequent case, and in a subsequent test. (It has implications for whether they will be seen as personally successful in learning the job, and as either 'hands-on' or 'bookish'.

Figure 8.2: Attributing the significance of scientific observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributing the significance of scientific observations</th>
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<td>Within science research</td>
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Figure 8.3: Attributing the significance of an experience within vocational education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributing the significance of an experience within vocational education</th>
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<tr>
<td>Within learning experiences within a vocationally oriented course an activity or experience can be construed as</td>
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<tr>
<td>--- responding to certain constraints that pervade professional practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--- representing one set of practices among many within the profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--- responding to the demands and constraints of the particular scenario</td>
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</table>

For example, a student who is learning professional practices in a vocational course may attribute their learning to the intended professional practices (as described in the course). However, this may not always be the case. The student may learn things that are not actually intended for their professional practice. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, the student may learn things that are not actually intended for their professional practice. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, the student may learn things that are not actually intended for their professional practice. This can happen for a number of reasons. For example, the student may learn things that are not actually intended for their professional practice. This can happen for a number of reasons.
activity or experience to the wider profession, they will see it as significant and meaningful. 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 texts. This attribution is therefore counterproductive to the students' development of 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". 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, this serves 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 tutors, there are often claims that the activity is "real" or "not real", and that the students will be "writing, say, 'a proper report', as they would do in a professional context. It is also common to hear students talking to each other in these terms. They may come to a course with an orientation to learning about the kind of professional activity in which they might be engaged in a future career. They may even be quite dismissive of an activity as "not real", and may draw on their prior knowledge and assumptions of "real" professional practice in guiding their writing.

I have come to be interested in this kind of talk, of tutors and students, because of its power in legitimizing and de-legalizing educational activities and experience. On the one hand, it is a part of a view of education in which relevance is even narrower 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 also interested in that previous students' work was frequently disappointing: this was despite 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 interview, the tutor told me that one of the key intentions of this course was to "underline 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:

you see with most of what we teach, we definitely give students the idea that science is in itself... something which is entirely under control... which is not real... because you only... draw conclusions which are as good as the data you've collected... and the bit of data you may think 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 enquiry 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 certainty, as fact, and their conclusions were categorical, as the following examples demonstrate:

At high flows the concentration of sediment is so dilute that oxygen levels would remain static... and the effects should be considered negligible.

(Nick)

Thus it is seen that scouring will be more pronounced nearer the pit with only a maximum increase of depth of 1.12 ft.

(Helena)

There was no discussion of the evident uncertainty in the data and methods. In his written assessment comments on their texts he often asks:

How do you know and does this work as: a collection of assertions without any discussion.

I say this because there is an unfortunate habit within education of attributing unassailable 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 rather easy 'explanations', they are ways of avoiding recognising the difficulties of teaching and learning academic and professional writing, by blaming individuals. In the short term they involve an unhelpful delegitimating 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 simple blaming individuals, and to recognize and explore the difficulties (for the tutors) 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 difficulties 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 assessments. He had considerable experience of the 'real world' of the profession. This is partly why his course was so interesting in terms of the operation of controversy. 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 approach 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 area or airport runway, and to communicate this to the local planning authorities. The UK is a 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 plan - 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 their permission I joined their meetings, in which they were discussing what they were going to do, generally helping, 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 discussion, and to the moments when they discussed these particular features or aspects of their texts. I was interested in the
practice. He attributed it to the professional context. However, the students understood the uncertainty as a consequence of the constraints, practices and policies of the educational context. They attributed the lack of time and resources, and the uncertainty or inadequacy of the data, to the educational context. They therefore did not experience this as insights into professional practice. Instead, they sought a rather idealized notion of professional practice, in which no constraints or demands would come into play. Significantly, for the students, if they view the constraints such as uncertainty as belonging in the classroom, while trying to produce a score in the wake of a professional within the professional context, then it becomes impossible for them to articulate the uncertainty within the text.3

What is interesting here is the potential of this kind of talk of what is ‘real’ and not ‘real’ to derail the intended learning from the experience. Crucially, the students have to view an experience as ‘real’ in order to view it as significant insight into the profession and to learn from it. In this case, for the students to understand that the task involved dealing with uncertainty, they needed to see it as significant; they needed to attribute the experience of uncertainty to the professional context, rather than the educational context.

For the students to be able 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 context was attributed. Here, I look at the planning of extraction technique within a different context. The task was to inform future decisions about the best way to extract wood from an area of forest. The problem was to find a location where the students could work with the planning authority at an early stage. Their task was to inform future decisions about the best way to extract the area with minimum impact, and whether this was even possible.

The problem: 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 most likely to be proposed by a future developer. The tutor explained that this would be the same as choosing the best option from the initial set of potential options, which would be more environmentally damaging and most likely to go planning permission. The act of choosing was therefore partly attributable to the professional context. However, as a first step in understanding the constraints, they could realistically assess one method. The act of choosing one was therefore also attributable to the educational context.
The students' confusion, and the implications for their texts

Within the students' meetings, when they were trying to work out exactly what was to do, the act of choosing an extraction technique became increasingly confusing. Without a clear understanding of the rationale for this "choice", when they were working within either the classroom or a 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 finially in their texts.

The students did retain the notion that the choice of extraction method was made prior to writing the texts. 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 another 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 texts reveal the significance of this in terms of the different function of their texts. He reprimanded them for announcing decisions as if they were already made, rather than informing future decisions.

...you have adopted the role of facilitator/project developer with only one possible scenario that of an independent arbiter whose role is to find an acceptable way for extraction, or if this is even possible... by the end of the session already made as a basis for an open discussion the merits of different approaches.

The shift is apparent if we look at extracts from their texts. Here, for example, Ali makes categorical and authoritarian comments about the decisions and future actions of the developer, as if those decisions are already made, and as if he himself is actually party to those decisions and actions:

Section 2: Project description
The extraction of the aggregate will be done using a chimney dweller...The chimney dweller will be examined in the north end of Block 5... The chimney dweller has examined a sample of soil...The chimney dweller had been... The main alternative to the chosen method of a chimney dweller... was extraction using a centreIFE chimney dweller but this proposal was rejected due to the following shoe-stringing... This contrasts with a previously successful text (given to me by the tutor as an illustration of what he wanted) in which the authors - as independent consultants - instead do four "the main decision that will need to be taken, upon the "main decision", chose the likely method for their own further analyses, and from their analysis identified 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 they name the distance of an independent third party.

The implications for the student's learning
Since the general function of EA is to inform decisions (both by the developer and by the planning authority), the students' own shift away from this, and towards the activity of making and assessing them, represented a major leap 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 talk about the more challenging function of informing decisions, then they would need that crucial understanding of the status of their "choice" of dweller within the professional scenario. They also needed a recognition that the form and function of their text was something new and unfamiliar, which they needed to learn. It involved more than repeating what they did 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 texts 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 confusion and indecision. These effectively threw them into question 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 informed analysis and discussion, their text had become 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 decisions from the alternative
Ali: this is what I did /
Robert: it's not what you put in an environmental assessment... you don't go for planning permission... and say 'oh well I've left all these other things'
Ali: I thought our job was to pick which we thought was the best... that's what I thought
By this time, the students had shifted to a different level of analysis, not in a process of learning by experience: they had made sense of the activity to be developed as an understanding of what a professional would do. The critique meant that they left the course in confusion.

Problems with general claims that the activity reproduces 'real' practical practice
Officially 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 form 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 professional settings. Only then could they consider the implications of those particular scenarios for their texts. Only then could they realize how their own text might actually need to be adjusted from 'real' examples they may find or be familiar with.

Significantly, this need to focus on the diversity of practice and texts therefore directly counters the temptation in higher education to make the general claim that an activity is 'real', or reproduces 'real professional practice'. This kind of claim is a kind of simple fallacy (that is common in course publicities, and in tutor and student talk in vocational courses) and inadequate and potentially misleading. It involves a very general attribution that may actually embed the students in understanding the significance of particular instructions and procedures and how these change students from the 'real' professionals, 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 'realities' behind unsuccessful aspects of their texts. This can offer practical insight into why these might have been unsuccessful, and can offer the future practical ways forward. It challenges 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 upon.

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

A Question of Attribution

The way in which I have addressed the 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 analyse 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, Barber and Davidson (1998) argue that knowledge and practice are inevitably 'fundamentally transformed' by being "re-contextualized" into the classroom, and when, for example, Forrester 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.

Be seeing what is 'real' and 'unreal' themselves, their analyses miss the negotiation of this within the classroom. They miss the ways in which making links to professional practice beyond the classroom (that involves a process of attributing significance to activities and experience, and learning from them). They miss the way in which simulations offer opportunities for students to gain personal experience and activity from the 'real world' activity already a prevalent practice, and the way in which students have a heightened sceptical 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 the course.

First, we need to realize that the significance of an experience is self-evident. As I have shown in Figures 8.1–8.4, 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 inevitably involves links to both the educational and professional contexts, 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 it within the classroom. In order for students to understand a particular activity or experience in the way we intend, we need to make explicit the significance that we attach to it. Secondly, we need to bear in mind that context of any course and science courses with an already sceptical view of claims that an activity or 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 a 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 kind 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 slipping 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 their 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 scenarios for the text. This is likely to seem unbelievable to the experienced scientist, but it is exactly what needs to be learned. If there are 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 practice 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 make their own text seem more authentically professional. To go beyond the reproduction of their existing practices, or of available examples, they need to be offered a range of chosen example 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.

Acknowledgements
My thanks to the ELA tutor and mentors whose teaching and writing I researched, and whose collaboration and insight made the research possible. My thanks also to Ria Baines and Greg Mears for our discussions on the research, and to Kate Rawls for her detailed comments on earlier drafts. An earlier version was presented at the British Association for Applied Linguistics Annual Meeting at Manchester University (September 1998); my thanks to the participants for their comments. The phrase "a question of ambition" is taken from the play of the same title by Alan Bennett.

Notes
1. I am adopting the practice of using single question marks around a term or phrase that I am not sure how to use. Consultation with the text/genre of the source and the assumptions and values behind it. Double question marks are used for an actual quotation.
3. Particularly available and interesting accounts of this within sociological studies of the construction of scientific knowledge include Latour (1987, 1993) and Gilbert and Mulkay (1984).
4. Transcript symbols used:
   - Speech
   - *Undescribed* indicates an apparent break between units of speech, indicated by the speaker through a change of tone or a pause
   - [...] indicates that the line in the extract some of the original utterance has been omitted
   - Underlined indicates author's emphasis
   - Italicized text indicates that this in the extract some of the original text has been omitted.

5. The tutor's account of uncertainty in ELA drew on his experience as an environmental assessor, commonly faced with the demand to make predictions from limited data, and his knowledge of the way in which ELAs are sought 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, Barnet and Thomas (1984: 118) 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 'literate acts' or individual constructive acts, are, according to Flower (1994: 15):

...negotiated, monitored, emergent, and context. 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 ..., and are often sites of negotiation where the meaning that emerges may reflect resolution, exhibit contradiction, or perhaps just a temporary shift against uncertainty.

To understand learning as a 'site of negotiation' is a useful way of exploring 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 'dysfunction' facing non-traditional mature learners once they have crossed the formal, institutional boundary (Weil 1986; Janes 1993) and has been argued that there is often a 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 Fisher 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, they do so as a result of resistance 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 1993 by introducing a new formal Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development. Many of our students — mature adult educators/trainers — now entered the programme without the formal requirements for entry to university study. We initiated a policy of 'alternative access' and encouraged any of our students who had completed one of the two previously non-formal programmes in our 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 dual 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 practitioners 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 'academic combinations of competencies' (Fairclough 1992a) students might be adopting in the process of writing 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 into 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, which would 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 that would require a reflection on their own work (see Appendix 1).

Secondly, we understood, given that many of our learners had no experience of formal higher education, that we needed to allow for them to become viable through writing practice. The question is addressed through qualitative case-study research of adult learners — writers — on the Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I explore experiences of learning and writing for success and the concerns involved in this. While I use the term 'success' in this study, I am aware that it is not unequivocal: both who and what determines success within and across contexts. Theory and practice in education are seen as interrelated, that the learning of new skills and knowledge is an integral part of the process of creating a sense of identity and belonging. In this way, increased possibilities for practitioner development and, I would argue, 'successful' learning were put in place. However, with the more to formalise the certificate course, the relationship between roles and learning became more complex.

Background and context

At UCT, certificate-based adult education provision has traditionally been non-formal. From the mid-1950s 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, Niswe- or Afrikaans-speaking and predominantly 'black' (used to denote both 'coloured' and 'African' apartheid social classifications), the students on the WLP were a mixture of 'CAEP-type' students and corporate- or industry-based trainers. There was also a strong representation of white, English- or Afrikaans-speaking students on the WLP courses over the years.

In 1993, the CAEP and WLP programmes were replaced by a single non-formal postgraduate certificate, the Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development (CAETD). The new programme was introduced to provide a more structured and formalised approach to adult education and training, with a focus on the needs of practitioners in the field. The programme was designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of adult learning theories and practices, as well as practical skills and knowledge to support their work. The programme was also designed to allow students to develop their own learning and research, and to contribute to the field through the production of quality research and educational materials.

The CAETD programme was structured around a series of modules, each focusing on a specific aspect of adult education and training. The modules included:

1. Adult Learning and Education: This module provided an overview of adult learning theories and models, as well as an exploration of the educational and social contexts in which adult learning occurs.
2. Adult Education and Training: This module focused on the principles and practices of adult education and training, including the planning, implementation, and evaluation of adult learning programmes.
3. Research Methods: This module covered research methodologies and data collection techniques, as well as the critical analysis and interpretation of research findings.
4. Professional Development: This module explored the professional development needs of adult educators and trainers, and provided strategies for developing individual and organisational capacity.
5. Ethics and Values: This module addressed ethical and value considerations in adult education and training, including issues of equity, diversity, and social justice.

The CAETD programme also included a significant component of practical work, with students required to complete a research project and a professional development plan. The research project provided an opportunity for students to engage in in-depth analysis of a specific aspect of adult education and training, while the professional development plan allowed students to plan and implement a practical project that directly addressed a need in their workplace.

The CAETD programme was designed to broaden the understanding of adult education and training, to enhance the skills and knowledge of practitioners, and to contribute to the development of the field. The programme was intended to provide a structured and formalised approach to adult education and training, while also allowing for flexibility and individualisation in the learning process. The programme was intended to enable students to develop their own learning and research, and to contribute to the field through the production of quality research and educational materials.
develop 'academic literacy practices' which would hopefully enable them to 'acquire the discourse' (see Gee, 1998), or at least an important component of it. We recognized, however, that the difficulties that students have with academic writing for assessment (see also Lea and Street, Chapter 2). Many studies explored the meaning of higher education to this (Chia, Stace, 1991; Flower, 1994; James, 1995). James (1995) also argues that many students tend to cast aside the importance of the assignment's grades, yet he argues that we often overlook the role that both assessment and lecturers play in 'legitimizing' 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 you're [weak points are]... it's how you can learn.

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

I felt it was sort of your fault that I wrote the whole thing because you didn't make it clear to us the sort of things 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: negotiating academic literacy demands

Thesen (1984), working from a sociocultural/sociological position, looks at second-language students' experiences of writing at university. She argues persuasively for an approach to learning which attempts to look at 'voice or subvoice... (as) meaning in the individual' (Thesen 1994: 36), yet without losing the meaning and contradictions these poses. Thesen believes we need to ask ourselves 'what meaning can be found - and between what' a discourse approach should be concerned with the interactions between people in a given context rather than relationships to text. This then allows for meanings to be located in the user or individual rather than the text. Discourse is therefore 'a process of meaning exchange, via language, in a given context. Individuals have differing access to these patterns of exchange in different contexts' (Thesen 1984: 25). She sees this interaction in an attempt to interpret the site of difference in negotiated meaning 'with the fundamental recognition that individuals do not have equal access to this process of negotiation' (Thesen 1994: 25). This means that 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 rules against one another, and what individuals do about this. Locating meaning in the individual does not mean that I am downgrading the social, but trying to find a starting point that is more profoundly social, in that it deals with human action, which must simply 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 turn to the active negotiation of meaning, thereby creating meaning in the interaction of alternatives, opportunities and constraints. For Flower (1994: 14), a literacy act is 'an individual constructive act... [which] can call for the orchestration of diverse, seemingly incommensurable practices... [these] also reflect the complex, even contradictory, goals and purposes that often drive meaning-making." This implies, following Clark and Norman (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 particular, they point to the situation, the context of 'culture' provides the range of possibilities which are competing for dominance. What she believes belongs to the task, in terms of her/her own attitudes towards it, beliefs about what is expected from the task and the purposes behind 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. Clark and Norman argue that the ways we may either resist or conform to the patterns of privileging within the context of culture. Bringing on theories of academic literacy (Lea 1998) further explores the contexts and contradictions students experience as they negotiate academic knowledge in relation to the diverse worlds of work, community and home. Lea (1998: 4) believes that 'a central part of the learning process for students is constrained 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 while learning often involves communication and challenge as students interrogate prior 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

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this process, she looks at three adult learning domains and the interactions between them: the domain of cultural/social contexts which situates the circumstances in which individual students learning is taking place; the learning tasks domain which is concerned with the texts that are produced and the ways in which students construct their academic knowledge through the production of these; and the domain of academic literacy which mediates the relationship between the other two domains. In considering these three domains, Lea argues that we need to better understand the different interpretations of text production and the ways in which these are embedded in cultural and social contexts. Within this frame, she highlights two approaches to learning: reformulation and reproduction. The former is one whereby students try and reproduce course materials, thereby attempting to 'learn the discourse', whereas the latter is often an explicit attempt on the part of students to relate a course to their own wider life world context. Adult learners in higher education, Lea believes, are thus trying to do two things simultaneously in producing text: they are trying to construct their knowledge in ways which make it appropriate for assessment, yet at the same time they are trying to maintain a sense of their own identity and the validity of other ways of knowing.

Learning and writing for 'success': the construction of roles

This brings us to the notion of 'role'. It is a useful and important concept in understanding learning as it can be argued that it is within roles that meaning is made and negotiated - it is a 'meaning-making/making active'. As different people relate differently in the same role, it is the acting out or social construction of a role that relates the individual to society. Furthermore, within a specific role, there is also space for 'subroles' such as 'best student' and 'student' - all of these are taken so as to establish a position in relation to other members of the group.

Kawano's (1998) study of adult learners in formal higher education settings highlights the importance of role in learning processes. Drawing on, and extending the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky and others, she explores adult learners' patterns of interaction with the higher education context. She identifies four patterns of interaction: conflict, withdrawal, accommodation and transformation - all of which look at the kind of learner-teacher relationship, the kind of learner role students identify for themselves, as well as their own perceptions of what higher education learning is about. Both Lea and Kawano employ an 'either/or' approach to learning and writing, whereas, in the words of one student, they exhibit an 'either/or' approach to their learning and writing experiences. I believe we need to understand that there are often multiple and even contradictory patterns which emerge in each student's experiences of learning. Negotiation and
Having grown up in Deep River, her family was moved to Mankato during the height of the Garvey Areas 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 experiences with her family. After leaving school at the end of second grade, getting married and having a child, Yasmine started working in a clothing factory as 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 organizer but felt that she would like to start an office where she could work on her own. Yasmine’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 large part in helping her to work through much of this conflict — both inside and outside the course.

The primary pattern of engagement Yasmine’s learning experiences was that of conflict (Kawenoo 1990) — she also adopted it as a way to challenge a prevalent approach to her learning (Lea 1990). However, there was evidence of withdrawal and accommodation (Kawenoo 1990) or reformulation (Lea 1990) in her account. Given strong linkages between her personal and learner identity, Yasmine’s experience demonstrated a fairly high sense of anxiety and conflict.

I wanted to give up at some stage.

She was unable to learn the skills of conflict, often experience life difficulties and, according to Kawenoo (1990: 11), ‘there 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 Kwanno argues is indicative of the withdrawal pattern. This was clearly evident in her relations with other students, with the lecturer and with her practices of writing. While the role of lecturer was important in her learning, she felt that:

there’ll always be this power thing.

Yasmine spoke of the conflicts between herself and the ‘professionals’, 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 Thomsen’s comments about the different ways in which discourses ‘rub up against each other’ and how students deal with the conflict this raises; 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 interview that she finds it easier than talking. In addition, it had become an important way of working through difficulties 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 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 mistakes, but I’m not perfect’ — she often feels disappointed. This is both with herself and with the lecturer.

like if I did an assignment and didn’t get the marks I thought I would
I get very upset with myself.

What is interesting, however, is that when Yasmine wrote assignments, while she might resist writing them, she managed in some ways to ‘suspend’ the inner turmoil and anxiety that often felt. On the cover sheet 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 socio-economic transformation and reform). Her assignment however, was hard, 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 lead to the ambivalence she expresses towards the topic initially. There is thus a third

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

While I have argued that withdrawal was also demonstrated by Yasmine in her account of her learning experience, particularly in her experience of accommodation, this does not mean she was not aware of or unable to recognise 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 up above this conflict. This was particularly through writing on the course. Her piece was work of many 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 1990).

**Nomei: the multiple roles we play**

Nomei, aged 48, is a single mother of three children. She grew up in Cape Town, one of 17 children. Actively involved in children’s rights, she describes her life as very ‘in and out’, something she feels is a result of her difficult family relations. Her ‘in and out’ identity also relates to periods spent in both the urban and rural areas, separated from her mother and brought up by her grandmother. She sees this as an important part of her identity experience; 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 Nomei and something which she brings into her learning on the course. Nomei currently works as a training teacher for a large non-governmental organisation. While she loves her job and working in the field, she is also very clear that by doing things for her community she should not create dependency.

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

For Nomei, 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 discussion were intimidating. This emphasised on group work, an important part of the course and strong feature of the discourse of much adults and experiential learning, was something that was contrary to her preferred learning experience.

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.

Nomei’s processes of meaning-making and negotiation had, therefore, to take place largely outside the social context 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 as the maximum 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 Kawenoo (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 broaden worldviews concerning the 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 beliefs. Elements of this pattern were strongly visible in Nomei’s account. For her, the importance of the relationship between her identity as adult and community worker, on the one hand, and that of lecturer, on the other, meant that she constantly made references 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. Nomei 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 lectures as mediators, she also saw herself and her life experience as important in guiding her learning.

The notion of ‘self-reflectiveness’ was also present when Nomei 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 Nomei in her writing to reflect on past experience and to express her opinions.
maybe there is an argument which you must reflect on from what you are reading. You have I agree with this but in your own words, 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 options (An), 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 reform the past.

A secondary pattern that also emerges in her account is that of accommodation. When she felt that ‘life experience taught you a lot’, she did not use the university as having value and the usefulness of the curriculum and transmission process as witnessing her indication of the importance of written assessment as telling you ‘right from wrong’. In many ways, Nontsi 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 ‘shaking her experiences outside the classroom with what she was learning’ are highly indicative of this.

I learnt to think deeply and also to add my experience about how this happened the previous time. More importantly, 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 experience of what has changed and what has not. This assignment will be based on community understanding [and] needs and what impact the RDP principles would have on the community. For Nontsi, 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 actively linked her learning on the course with her own outside world(s). She also showed flexibility in her learning so that where 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 Nontsi, on the whole, they seemed more positive experiences than for Yasmine. 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 acquiring the discourse.

Conclusion
In exploring these two students’ experiences of learning and writing, I have argued that the ways in which teacher 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 Yasmine, 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 Nontsi, 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 curriculum and pedagogical practice, particularly through assessment tasks. These are the class 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 (Lee 1996) 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 act students up for failure; or at the very least, feelings of disjunction (Wall 1996) which could lead to disappointment and even possible withdrawal from higher education.

Note
1. DEC and DET are the abbreviations under which the education departments of the apartheid era were known. DEC was the Department of Education and Culture for ‘coloured’ students, and DET the Department of Education and Training for ‘African/black’ students.

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Appendix 1: Question paper for Assignment 4 of the Certificate Programme

CERTIFICATE IN ADULT EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXTUAL STUDIES (EMS183SW)

ASSIGNMENT 4

PLEASE NOTE:
• This assignment should be between 3 and 5 written A4 pages
• YOU MUST CHOOSE EITHER 4A OR 4B
• DUE DATE: 4.00 pm, TUESDAY AUGUST 15

ASSIGNMENT 4A

What do you think the RDP would look like if it was successfully implemented in your community or workplace?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:
In order to complete this assignment successfully, we expect you to:
• show that you have a good understanding of the development needs of your community/workplace
• demonstrate that you have some understanding of the underlying principles of the RDP
• show the ability to interpret these principles in relation to the situation in your own community/workplace
• put forward a clear argument of your view on the meaning of the RDP.

ASSIGNMENT 4B
‘The RDP means all things to all people.’

Do you agree with the above statement? Make a clear argument, backed up by evidence, as to whether this statement is true or not. In order to answer this assignment, you will need to research the different views, understandings and meanings that people bring to the RDP. You should interview a minimum of 5 people, and they should be as different as possible (in terms of culture, language, class background, occupation, gender, etc.).
Appendix 2: Cover sheet for Assignment 4 of the Certificate Programme

CERTIFICATE IN ADULT EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTUAL STUDIES (EM1059)

ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET

Name: [Student Name]

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, who you talked to, 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:

Elizabeth Hoadley-Maidment

Introduction

Professional education is an expanding area of university work. As professionals such as nurses, pharmacists, and social workers, students are being fundamentally restructured and there is a growing literature on the nature of professional education (Bijou and Winter, 1982; Ernst, 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 relationship 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 simply 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 in similar written examinations. When these disciplines are taught within professional courses which aim to develop professional competence, we must consider the relationship between the types of writing required and the aims and objectives of the course. The question for those teaching professional courses is how to ensure that they are designed in ways which will ensure that students learn to make the links between academic concepts and theories and professional practice.

In this chapter I want to examine the connections between models of professional education and academic literacies, as well as the practical implications of these for teaching and assessment. My interest in this area stems from work I undertook at the School of Health and Social Welfare at the Open University. The Open University is a distance-learning institution which until recently has taught mainly through written texts. This threw into sharp relief the potential contradictions between linguistic approaches to academic learning and literacy, and practice-based models of professional education. Although the issues discussed here arise in the context of distance learning, they apply to all forms of professional education in which students are expected to write at length and are, I would suggest, particularly pertinent to developments in computer-mediated learning (CAL) and open learning where students may have less face-to-face contact with their tutors and more demands made on their use of the written word.

The chapter begins by outlining relevant theories of academic literacy and professional education. I then report on how these issues were perceived by a group of academics working in the area of health and social welfare. The last section considers the implications of my findings for the teaching of academic literacies within professional education.

Academic discourse, academic literacies and professional education

Linguistic approaches

As a verb, ‘academic discourse’ is problematic. It is widely used, but in differing ways by individual disciplines. Any discussion of student as writers must start, not with a disciplinary-based definition but with a linguistic one. Sociolinguists such as Skir (1980) regard individual academic disciplines as discourse communities, each using language in particular ways. There are communities between them, however, so that it is also possible to talk of academic discourse as a general form of English. All academic communities use written communication in a broad way. This is a result both of the tradition of academic publishing and because communities are very widespread geographically. The language of a discourse community consists not simply of technical language in the sense of individual words or jargon, but also rest of rules for using these in spoken and written forms. In this sense each academic discipline—for example, psychology or sociology—is an individual discourse community. However, academic disciplines also share 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 created by the use of abstract nouns, passive verbs and a tendency to avoid the use of pronouns such as ‘it’ or ‘we’ which identify the writer. It is also common for sentences to have grammatically simple form but complex content, to include large numbers of nouns and adjectives whose main function is to make meaning more precise. Sentences are frequently ‘front-loaded’ with noun phrases or clauses illustrating the main subject appearing before the main verb.

In addition to these grammatical features, academic writing adopts easily recognizable forms. These range from academic papers and books aimed at highly knowledgeable members of the discourse 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, projects and reports, different kinds of paper referred to as ‘subgenres’. While students are not expected to have the same grasp of the concepts and theories they are writing about (Hibber 1985), student writing is still recognizable as academic writing and is unlikely to be confused with vocational writing which matures students, in particular, may already use freely 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 recognizable. 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 socialization 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 may never have followed vocational rather than academic paths on leaving school and consequently find it difficult to grasp the importance of conventions such as the organization 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 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 refer to the subject, but also as an indication that they realize the importance of acknowledging sources and not plagiarizing. In other words, learning to write reference lists 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 coursework. Mode of study is important here. Full-time students obviously have greater opportunities to practice new discourses but may be learning in two or three different discourses simultaneously, depending on their programme of study. Part-time students generally study only one or, at most, two subjects at once, so the complete picture can be somewhat more complex. Students can also benefit from discussion in the home, so they need to be encouraged to discuss concepts and ideas, possibly even at home. Finally, there are students studying by distance learning. Their lack of access to the community is usually addressed by 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 social-semiotic approaches to language teaching are familiar with the theoretical and methodological implications of the different approaches to teaching and theory which underpin a wide variety of courses. Most approaches to teaching and theory which underpin a wide variety of courses have been influenced by a single theoretical approach. The first theory which is discussed is the theoretical approach to teaching and theory which underpins a wide variety of courses, and the second is the theoretical approach to teaching and theory which underpins a wide variety of courses.

The theory emphasizes communication, although Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication.

The theory emphasizes communication, although Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication. Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as one of the fundamental building blocks of the language of these disciplines. This view differs from the view that communication is the only form of communication.
The survey was conducted at the end of the 1995 academic year so that respondents were able to draw on the experiences and projects they had just marked when responding.

At that time the School offered eight second-level courses, each worth 30 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points. All the courses had a workload of approximately 6–9 hours a week over a 30-week teaching year, during which students completed four written assignments. The assessments varied, but most courses asked for three essays and one longer piece of work (an examined essay or project) which provided an opportunity for students to undertake a small investigation related to their job, or alternatively to pursue a topic through library research. This longer piece varied in length between 3000 words and 5000 words. There were no fixed requirements to write a minimum number of words or a maximum number of words, so students could write as much or as little as they wished.

The survey aimed to elicit the views of the students’ strengths and weaknesses in relation to academic writing. The respondents were people with academic expertise in social sciences and professional expertise in health and social care: none of them described themselves as having expertise in academic writing although, like the majority of Open University teachers, they had experience of working with mature students who needed support in this area.

They were first asked to rank the competence of students as academic writers on a simple five-point scale, where 1 indicated that most students needed help and four that some students needed help. Three said that most students performed at low level but were fine by the end of the course. Given that help with writing would be provided by part-time tutors, the respondents were not able to indicate whether this was as a result of help from the tutors or, if so, what form this took.

The lecturers were also asked to rank different types of written communication in order of importance to their course on a three-point scale from very important to not important. This revealed that academic argument was considered to be the most important form of writing, closely followed by the ability to draw on personal (including work) experience as support for assignments – the latter being seen as either ‘very important’ or ‘important’.

In most cases there was an assumption that students understood what was expected when asked to contribute to the academic experience and what was expected of them. Few said that students had particular problems with the reflective project. The weaknesses were given as a failure to understand the need to analyse, together with a lack of understanding of the handling and interpretation of data. The latter is not, strictly speaking, an academic writing skill, but in a distance-learning course the only way students can indicate that they have learnt research skills is through their written work.

All thought that many of the students were taking the course as their first Open University course and commented on the implications of this. For example:

- we attract people direct from the field. They are often steeped in practice, but unused to academic study and writing.
- the questionnaire provided space for additional comments. Detailed comments were made which showed that many concerns were common ones. Comments such as the following were typical:

  - ‘I have difficulty in using personal experience in an appropriate way (in a vehicle to organise course themes and issues, etc.).’

  - ‘I can see no opportunity for this course to illustrate a point of argument rather than just ‘tell the page’.

The use of personal experience as an exemplar is actually quite a sophisticated process and I don’t think that often people can see that the personal experience cited in the course has already been very carefully structured and we go a lot of streams of conversation stuff where insights are deeply embedded and not pulled out to support an argument.

In one case, however, those teaching the course had over the years decided that they could not assume students had these skills and had adapted the assessment strategy to take this into account. The difficulty of providing academic socialisation in course such as this was also commented on. One person considered that it was more difficult for students to:

- challenge and innovate in the face of a set of materials as opposed to a person,

and felt that this was coupled with low levels of experience in presenting arguments, this revealed in problems. This respondent was particularly aware of the impact of distance and asynchronous methods on the development of academic literacy and the skills which are associated with ‘graduateness’.

Importance of spoken language in the development of writing by adult students is well documented at levels from basic education (Bonham 1965) and return to learning (Gardner 1985) to language support for university students (Clark and Brown 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 system. Tutorials are optional and the main form of communication between students and tutors is a high-sophisticated form of written material incorporating exchanges of written notes and comments. Students have no prior experience of this type of writing or of using formal written communication. In addition, students have often not experienced a need to listen to or engage with written material. One tutor commented:

- “The challenge in not-based 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 Schon. 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 student and tutor around the student’s assessed written work. Reflective diaries are useful here because they help students reflect on their existing professional experience as they make the links between their practice and the theories, concepts and issues contained in the course, within a personal form of writing which will be assessed.”

Reflective learning also means 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 their needs are not being met by expressing themselves in writing at the beginning of the course, especially if they have no background of university study. As the significance of the importance of text, they often feel under great pressure to become confident writers quickly, both in order to complete their written work and more generally because they may need to communicate with tutors and other students in writing. In a sense, these learners are forcing learners to write about personal experience, as opposed to drawing on it in spoken discussion, becomes a priority. Comparative learning, especially the use of argumentative techniques, makes similar demands.

Additionally, courses frequently ask students to develop higher-order academic competencies while not explicitly showing them how to do this and not explaining how these skills arise from their work and the professional education and expertise they already have. It is therefore apparent that students need to know at the beginning of the
From Personal Experience to Reflective Practitioner 177

Elizabeth Hardisty-Mailout

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 galvanizes in a practice so that students can begin to reframe their experience using academic discourse as a key factor in an assessed assignment. This should begin by being more explicit about the positive value of studying part-time, particularly the opportunity it provides to feed back 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 putting 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 Lee, Chapter 4 for further discussion of the relationship between conferencing and learning.)

It is also important to use written tools for learning rather than confounding the learning and assessment function. Reflective diaries, noting 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 then 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, those are staff development implications. Tutors on professional courses are generally recruited because they have appropriate academic knowledge and relevant professional expertise as well as teaching skills. Few, however, see themselves as language or communications specialists, assuming that students should have learnt such competences at an earlier stage and often not feeling confident to undertake what is often perceived as remedial teaching. But the increasing emphasis in universities on 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 professional elements are increasingly tackling these issues (Rams 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 assessable within systems designed for academic learning. Courses such as those I have described bring together two approaches to learning: 'traditional' academic learning of theoretical academic knowledge and 'reflective-learning' whereby 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.

Barry Sierer

Schoolteachers as Students: Academic Literacy and the Construction of Professional Knowledge within Master's Courses in Education

Every year, thousands of British schoolteachers begin work towards a master's degree in education, based in a UK university or college. Their studies typically require them to read research and scholarship about aspects of education, to carry out practical activities and research projects, and to prepare written assignments. Their reasons for embarking on such courses vary. They may wish to improve their job prospects, or to change their careers. They may wish to improve their teaching effectiveness, and, by gaining a greater understanding of certain aspects of their work as teachers, they may wish to learn about an aspect of education which is new to them, perhaps because they would like to work in that area in the future. They are highly motivated students. Most of them pay their own fees for what is, at least in part, a form of professional development. Most of them work towards their degrees in their own time; indeed, few are given time off from their teaching commitments in order to attend sessions or to make progress with their studies. This chapter discusses the results of a research project that examined the kinds of writing schoolteachers are required to produce as part of their work within master's-level programmes in the field of education. The Master of Arts in Education programme at my own institution, the Open University (OU), was used as the main case study for this project during the 1997 academic year, based on an analysis of course materials, interviews with MA students and tutors, and an analysis of students' assignments and the written feedback they receive from their tutors.
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; Fitchpatrick 1988), which I would argue define the MA programme — and indeed many MA programmes in education — attempts to incorporate: the first of these places particular value on the traditional intellectual competences of the "academic", at least in the humanities and social sciences: the construction of a coherent argument: appropriate use of evidence and argumentation: the nature of those accounts of work that would have these discourses unilaterally define the professional mission of one's learning, and the need to link the results of study to professional competences and practical outcomes. Whether, and how, these competing discourses can ultimately be reconciled within a single programme of study was one of the main issues in the research. A key assumption underpinning the research was that it is within the "literacy practices" associated with these courses — and especially in the writing requirements — that these two orders of discourse are most acutely focused.

Most 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 unilaterally — with the expectation that their professional experience will provide them with many of the resources needed in order to produce assignments and thereby successfully fulfill assessment requirements. One of the starting points for the research was an observation that many teachers studying within the MA programme experienced considerable confusion about the expectations they were attempting to meet, with respect to writing, sometimes leading to fraught conflicts with their tutors. They experienced the most difficulty despite the fact that Open University course materials are generally considered to be exceptional in the extent to which they make such expectations explicit. I suspected that this confusion was in part due to 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 underresearched area of professionally oriented teaching at postgraduate level. The project also sought to apply some of the ideas, emerging 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.

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 conceptualized as a set of social practices embedded in networks of culture and power, rather than seeing 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 point where power is exerted and contested. This perspective problematizes these practices, and recognizes that students' negotiated failures in academic literacies 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 (Boud 1992). Such a perspective has provided a helpful explanatory framework for research into the academic writing carried out by schoolteachers within 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, I would refer the reader to the editors' introduction to this volume.

Another field of research and scholarship is pertinent to this investigation, and that is the area of "professional knowledge", or "expert knowledge" — and teachers' professional knowledge in particular. One of the most extensive studies of this is Schlesinger (1983, 1987; Koll 1984; and Erna 1994). It is from this body of work that the concept of "competence" is derived and is used here as a means to study the ways in which professional knowledge is encoded in language (Ginns and Johnson 1987), but apparently none has examined the styles of written language which have become associated with professional training. My starting point is that it is in the language practices, within an area of activity such as teachers' professional development, that the struggles over what constitutes important professional knowledge for teachers are played out. The research project is designed to explore the area of interest of this investigation: the way in which professional knowledge constitutes, and is constituted in, specialized forms of language.

The other starting point for this research is that this is a form of "practitioner research" for me. Most of my own professional practice over the past ten years has been located within the OU's MA in Education programme. In professional terms, I was trying to gain a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding academic writing for MA students in my own institution, in order to improve both the advice we give to students and the professional development we offer to teachers.

The Open University MA in education

At any one time there are about 4000 students in the OU's MA in Education programmes in the UK, Ireland and continental western Europe. They are distanced learners, working in computer-mediated isolation with multimedia materials, and submitting written assignments to a tutor, whose views may be quite different from those of the students. 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 organizes its materials, and in the way students 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.

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 being an analysis of 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 assignment 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 every student taking the course, no matter where in the world they live; 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, regardless of the three modules a student chooses to study, they will be expected to produce a wide range of types of writing. Table 11.2 provides the list of types of writing required 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 some individual student's programmes could be constructed so that at least 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 genre label is used. So it is only really by looking at individual assignment specifications that the diversity of these methods becomes clear. Nevertheless, with such an array of writing types across the programme — with some students only encountering certain genre categories once or
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 designed to help students "unpack" the question. After a preliminary analysis of these texts, four categories of text features were identified as significant:

1. Explicit instruction or directions about what the student is expected to do.
2. Suggestive statements about what the student is expected to do, with possible interpretations or guidance.
3. Questions that ask students to describe or explain what they have done, often in the context of a previous assignment.
4. Uses of imperative verbs.

Early group learning: setting the scene for the "government and politics" module

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 problematize 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 string 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 a course team 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 difference 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 EEB8 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 appreciated the differences between two types of writing. When writing an academic essay students are sometimes tempted to display their erudition by splicing 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 lumping together some extent the expectations conventionally associated with academic essays. The sardonic 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 a term that achieving clarity and logic is merely a matter of avoiding an over-reliance 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 assignment 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 EEB8, based on their previous experience of study, and to point out some of the differences between management reports and academic essays.

Wars 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 when answering the question or completing the task assigned. This is because the indications 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 in professional development 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 students’ professional work is referred to (if at all) in these modules. There is clearly no expectation underlying these assignments that students are expected to, or even to, draw upon their professional experience as teachers in order to acquire, and succeed at, the writing task. Indeed, for most modules 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 steps 1–4 you are asked to provide a critical review of the mentoring programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the institution, the student mentor, and/or course own professional development. In step 5 you are asked to examine the concept of the ‘mentoring school’ and use the principles of mentoring for monitoring the other student mentee’s performance within your institution.

You are required to reflect on your discussion within the wider educational debates on mentoring by referring to the research and literature in the field, such as are indicated in the Study Guide. In addition, you are encouraged to present evidence from your own ongoing experience in support of your conclusions.

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Table 11.5: A selection of imperatives taken from assignment specifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluate</th>
<th>Justify</th>
<th>Write a report</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critically evaluate</td>
<td>Construct a conceptual framework</td>
<td>Engage with theoretical issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyse</td>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Suggest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically appraise</td>
<td>Give a brief description</td>
<td>Comment on evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine</td>
<td>Describe and analyse</td>
<td>Apply to model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically examine</td>
<td>Write a critical account of a text</td>
<td>Report what happens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on</td>
<td>Provide a report</td>
<td>When you apply your knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical feedback</td>
<td>Consider the topic</td>
<td>(diagram model)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically reflect on</td>
<td>Outline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

modules. All modules were very similar, however, in their deficiency to define these imperatives. With only one or two exceptions, the course team’s ideas on how to go about following such instructions is not made explicit, and yet these imperatives represent key indicators of the kind of writing task the student is expected to undertake. This remarkable range of imperatives provides clear evidence of the taken-for-grantedness with which academic teams approach the task of preparing assignments, as well as the curiosity of the ‘code’ which succeeds in making it in order to complete their assignments successfully. How, for example, should students understand the differences between ‘critically evaluate’, ‘critically examine’, ‘critically discuss’ and ‘critically appraise’—and, indeed, between ‘evaluate’ and ‘critically evaluate’? It is possible that, for some academic teams, the terms are semantically interchangeable, whereas a conscientious student might reasonably seek to distinguish the meanings of these different key terms.

Discussion

Space constraints do not permit a discussion here of the other strands of the research project, such as the concomitance between students’ notes and the analysis of students’ written assignments and the written feedback received from their tutors. There will be reported in the future. Nevertheless, the following discussion, of items arising from the foregoing analysis of the assignment booklets for the modules in the OU’s MA programme, is informative to some extent by provisional findings from these other research strands.

These analyses of the assignment booklets raise a number of important questions, which extend well beyond the superficial issue of inadequacy specificities in setting out the requirements for students’ writing. The sections identified by this analysis appear to reveal a deep confusion within the programme of the level of epistemological commitment to any consistency amongst the programmes about the professional knowledge that
Teachers are expected to demonstrate by means of these high-styled writing forms. The rebuff of these course teams to make explicit the kinds of professional knowledge they aim to promote through written assignments suggests that these teams have little not given adequate considerations to this. They may not have expected, or not to make their aims visible to students. Many of the privileged genres of writing in the programme have been part of the curriculum – from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and are therefore not appropriate for promoting the professional knowledge that is (implicitly) sustainably within these courses.

These findings are illuminated by data from 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 debaters or to handle theoretical concepts persuasively in their writing. In this sense, the predominance of impermanent and traditional academic writing genres within a number of modules account in part for their sense of uncertainty and frustration – especially since the relevance of such genres in relation to their professional apperceptions is so rarely articulated within course materials.

The analysis also revealed constant variation within and between modules, in the style of writing required, in the kind of advice on writing given, in the outcomes towards the students’ 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 respondents, it became clear that the more successful students started from scratch, the attempt to puzzle out 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 was also frustrated by the irony of the literature emerging from the analysis of the assignment booklet. That analysis revealed how constructively tutors used their feedback to try to induct 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 formal and professional knowledge deemed by course teams, and instead by students, as important.

At the same time, taken together, these findings suggest that the writing assigned to teachers as part of their MA studies constitutes significantly to the way the programme positions MA students as novices. This does not sit 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 disadvantaged when they start. They struggle to identify, and learn how to use, specialist approaches in order to succeed in what for many of them is a new field of activity. This in itself does not surprise them, though they may not articulate it this way, that they sign up for the MA for professional reasons, and suddenly find that they are positioned as novice students rather than, as they prefer, expert insiders. Many of the language used in the assignment booklet, and the feedback students receive from tutors on assignments, is framed in terms of inducing students into a specific academic discourse. At best the students can take this as 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 teams 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 first years of teaching. That is the professional culture with which they identify, and it is from the perspective of remaining to study for an MA. They do not embark on their MA studies as the first step in a career change from professional teachers to professional academics, and yet many of the literacy 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 insurmountable: both orders of discourse are professional. The issue, therefore, is one of professional cultures clashing: the professional culture of schoolteaching and the (higher-education) professional culture of the academy. Whereas school-teachers embarked on their studies in order to enhance their effectiveness as, or means 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 institutional authority, and, in this way, is an ideology which positions students of any type as relatively powerless (Booth et al., 1998). The materiality of the programme brings their literacy practices to their studies, and indeed the discourse and knowledge that school-teachers manage to construct for themselves as professionals as a result of their studies, are only sanctioned by the institutions when they can be meaningfully realized in the language of the novice academic.

I would speculate that the literacy practices that have grown up around the study of education originated in contexts where people studying education appeared to have a ‘nursery language’ for discussing vital aspects of academic writing. Terms such as ‘arguing’, ‘critical’ and ‘analysis’, which were often used in course materials 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 with them to their study of these courses the particular forms of cultural capital (Booth et al., 1998) that might enable other students quickly to identify the distinctive discourse rules operating within their courses and to produce forms of writing which would meet the ground rules. Nevertheless, it is an emerging with which all students on such programmes could produce adequate answers.

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 comprehensive examination 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 such 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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The Society for Research into Higher Education

The Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) exists to stimulate and coordinate research into all aspects of higher education. It aims to improve the quality of higher education through the encouragement of debate and publication on issues of policy, on the organization and management of higher education institutions, and on the curriculum, teaching and learning methods.

The Society is entirely independent and receives no subsidies, although individual events often receive sponsorship from business or industry. The Society is financed through corporate and individual subscriptions and has members from many parts of the world.

Under the imprint SRHE of Open University Press, the Society is a specialist publisher of research, having over 65 titles in print. In addition to SRHE News, the Society publishes three journals: Studies in Higher Education (three issues a year); Higher Education Quarterly and Research into Higher Education (three issues a year).

The Society runs frequent conferences, consultations, seminars and other events. The annual conference in December is organized at and with a higher education institution. There are a growing number of networks which focus on particular areas of interest, including:

- Access
- Assessment
- Curriculum Development
- European Universities
- Educational Development Research Group
- Funding
- Graduate Employability
- Learning Environment
- Legal Education
- Managing Innovation
- New Technologies for Learning
- Postgraduate Issues
- Quantitative Studies
- Student Development
- Vocational Qualifications

Benefits to members

Individually
- The opportunity to participate in the Society’s networks
TEACHING FOR QUALITY LEARNING AT UNIVERSITY
John Biggs

...full of down-to-earth good advice for every academic who wants to do something practical to improve his or her students’ learning... there are very few writers on the subject of university teaching who can engage a reader as personally and expressively as Biggs. A reliable research finding to the contrary is personal experience.

Paul Ramond

John Biggs tackles how academics can improve their teaching in the context of large classes and diverse student populations. His approach is practical but not prescriptive. Teachers need to make decisions on teaching and assessment methods to suit their own circumstances. In order to do that they need a conceptual framework to inform their decision-making. Such a framework is clearly described and exemplified by this book. University teachers can readily adopt the ideas here to change their subjects and teaching conditions. Particular focus is placed on providing an accessible, jargon-free guide for all university teachers interested in enhancing their teaching and their students’ learning.

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John Cowan

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Professor George Brown... succeeds in inspiring the reader by making the process of reflective learning interesting and thought provoking... has a narrative drive which makes it a book too good to put down.

Dr Mary Thorpe

What comes through very strongly is a sense of the author’s own personal experience, what it felt like to take risks and how his own practice developed as a result of taking risks, exploiting unexpected territories – the book has the potential to become the reflective practitioner’s bible.

Dr Lorena Stefanu

This unusual, accessible and significant book begins each chapter by putting a question with which college and university teachers can be expected to identify; and then goes on to answer the question by presenting a series of examples; finally, each chapter closes with a second thought, presenting a viewpoint somewhat distinct from that taken by John Cowan. This book will assist university teachers to plan and run innovative activities to enable their students to engage in effective reflective learning; it will help them adapt other teachers’ work for use with their own students; and will give them a rationale for the place of reflective teaching and learning in higher education.

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