Student Writing in Higher Education: New Contexts

Edited Book

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Editors’ Introduction

Mary R. Lee and Barry Sliefer

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 to the attention of fellow university teachers some of the exciting work currently being done in the areas of student learning and academic literacy, within what we are calling ‘new contexts for student writing in higher education’. We use the term ‘new contexts’ to refer to two phenomena in today’s higher education. First, we have to 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 issues arising from the contributions in the book which will enhance the quality of our colleagues’ everyday work with students. For this reason, each chapter features work with students that will be immediately recognizable to fellow university teachers. Moreover, we have asked each contributor to draw out from their analyses the practical implications for teaching and learning activities.

Second, we have a strong interest, as educational researchers, in what we will refer to as social practice perspectives for understanding student writing in higher education. By identifying, and bringing together, work that has been informed by these perspectives, we are seeking to show how they are yielding new insights in this field, and at the same time to show how this work accrues 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 relevance in more traditional settings as well.

Background

The development of research areas 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 Learning and Teaching Committee 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 lifelong learning and the necessity for universities to adapt their provision to make it possible for learners to enter higher education for training and retraining at a number of different points in their lives. As a consequence of these changes in the student body, universities are increasingly offering not only ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ courses in order to help non-traditional students 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; 1994; Gee 1992; Leask, 1997) which is embedded in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the cultures of academic disciplines in higher education. The social practice perspective adopted by all the contributors reflects an important conceptual shift in the study of student writing in higher education. Much of the existing work in this area approaches student writing from an essentially ‘skills-based’ perspective. That is, writing in higher education is assumed to be a competence which, once acquired, enables students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in virtually any context. The qualities of ‘good writing’ are assumed to be self-evident, and largely a matter of learning and mastering universal rules of, for example, grammar, usage and text organisation. Explanations for students who experience problems with writing (and to locate the problem as a deficit in the student rather than as an aspect of the way in which the ground rules of academic writing become established and negotiated in particular academic contexts. This traditional ‘skills-based’ approach is manifest most clearly in the growing tendency to consign the teaching of writing to 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 vocational programmes, including courses for professional training, retraining and in-service training;
- the move away from fixed progression through degree programmes; and
- increasing use of modular programmes.

The paperization 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 underlying 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 irrelevant (at worst).

By adopting a social practice and contextual perspective the contributions 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 the field. We have tried to select a range of topics that are interesting and relevant to our readership. This has resulted in a diverse collection of chapters that cover a wide range of topics.

The introduction to each chapter provides a brief overview of the main arguments and findings presented in that chapter. These introductions are intended to give readers an idea of what to expect from each chapter and to help them decide which chapters might be of the most interest to them.

In addition to the introductions, each chapter includes a summary of the key points and conclusions. These summaries are intended to help readers quickly grasp the main ideas presented in each chapter.

As a whole, this collection provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field and highlights some of the most important developments and debates currently taking place.

The editors have worked closely with the contributors to ensure that each chapter is well-written and well-organized. We hope that this collection will be valuable to researchers, educators, and practitioners in the field of academic disciplines and will provide a useful resource for anyone interested in this area.
and their own personal experience. Aiving from these chapters are questions about the relationship between these new forms of writing and more traditional forms of writing. However, this remains an area of investigation. The authors explore some of the tensions that exist for student writers in these new contexts as they engage with forms of writing which, like the term paper, are a familiar essay genre. McMillan sees her students as using their writing as a route to success in their studies, enabling them to be selected for other courses. However, her students are concerned with their writing in the context of teaching theoretical knowledge and reflection-in-action. Lea, in her research on computer conferencing, questions how easy it is for students to make connections between the more reflective written texts of the conference and the written work that students have in hand for assessment which still requires a traditional 'essay' genre. Moving more specifically to the wording of assignment questions in a master's programme in education, Barry Sierec provides evidence for a number of contrasting disciplinary genres having been imported into the programme. He goes on to examine what the implications of these contradictory genres might be for student writers in terms of understanding assessment requirements. Moving into an area which is of increasing importance, 'learning to write' has resulted in a wider range of approaches to writing for student writers on their courses by examining the correspondences between writing and choreography — with an implication that other practical and/or creative activities can be used as a 'way in' to the writing process for some students.

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

Universities have been involved in the training and updating of professionals for a very long time. Indeed it has sometimes been said, only partly facetiously, that universities have been positioned as providers of training for virtually every professional group except (until recently) those of university teachers. There are nevertheless important changes taking place in the contexts within which such training is carried out. The growing emphasis on the skills needed in learning to write has resulted in a wider range of approaches to writing for student writers on their courses by examining the correspondences between writing and choreography — with an implication that other practical and/or creative activities can be used as a 'way in' to the writing process for some students.

The study of dance is not, strictly speaking, professional training as such. Nevertheless, Sally Minnich and her colleagues offer some interesting discussions in Chapter 11 of the tensions between practical (creative) work in the university and the relentless downward pressure to conform to conventional models of academic writing. In this sense, their analysis helps to illuminate the broader question as to whether the teaching of writing is, in itself, a vocational subject and whether it is necessary to develop through their studies, and the forms and styles of academic writing available to them for displaying their knowledge, understanding and competence. They also describe some innovative classroom practice, which attempted to help students identify their role and place within the university, between the disciplines and the university, and the process of academic writing, about which they often feel less confident.

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In Chapter 8, Simon Parcours examines a writing task that represents an attempt to simulate a form of professional writing regularly produced in the workplace. Modern students are acquiring frequently result in a substantial impact assessment. His analysis focuses on the concept of 'attributions', by which he means the kind of significance students attach to a particular activity in relation to their learning and professional achievement. He shows how students' apparent errors in the execution of their writing tasks often result in a tendency to attribute their performance to the educational context in which the assignment was constructed, rather than to problems that are in fact inherent in the professional context which was the task intended to simulate. In other words, their familiarity with the position of 'student' took precedence, in their interpretation of the writing task, over their position as 'trainee professional'. He concludes by offering useful suggestions for ways in which students may be helped to understand how learning from experience is constructed within specific tasks.

In Chapter 10, Elizabeth Huddie-Maddison discusses a number of issues surrounding the relationship between academic writing and the concept of the 'reflective practitioner'. She questions the wisdom of importing writing forms and assessment approaches from traditional academic disciplines into devising assignments on professionally oriented courses, and invites fellow practitioners to consider how the vocational demands of the professions relate to the academic disciplines they expect students to use in their writing. She also provides a useful review of critiques of the concept of the 'reflective practitioner', which has traditionally been the subject of many reviews in many quarters.

These concerns are echoed by Barry Sierec in Chapter 11. He examines the tension between academic and professional 'orders of discourse' within the writing requirements on master's courses in academic disciplines, devising assignments on professionally oriented courses, and invites fellow practitioners to consider how the vocational demands of the professions relate to the academic disciplines they expect students to use in their writing. He also provides a useful review of critiques of the concept of the 'reflective practitioner', which has traditionally been the subject of many reviews in many quarters.

Writing and student identities: whose agenda, whose knowledge, whose written forms?

We return here to a suggestion made earlier that student writing at university has to be regarded as both homogeneous and transferable from course to course both outside and within the university. Implicit in this perspective is the assumption that writing is concerned with a set of decontextualised skills which bear little relationship to issues of power and identity. Many of the authors in this volume raise issues of identity as playing a large part in student writing. They conceptualise the academic as making demands on student writers which result in a conflict between academic ways of knowing and writing, and other ways of knowing and writing from other more familiar contexts which explores ways in which academic knowledge is constructed in different subject areas. He examines four contexts in which identities are identifiable in the writings of established academics: the object of the field, the anticipated audience, and the author's own self. His analysis recognises the crucial importance of the writer's self in the academic writing.
process. Why, then, should we conceptualize the work of student writers as being any different? In her study of mature adult students, Harris (1998) further explores the importance of the self by making distinctions between the 'authobiographical self', 'the discursive self' and the 'self as author'.

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

Mary Scott's chapter (7) is concerned with the sense of agency of student writers following a postgraduate certificate in education course. She suggests that there is an inherent problematic in the close correspondence which is often assumed by examiners between students' writing and their own identities as reflective and active practitioners. She suggests that it is more valuable to see students' written texts as examples of discourses shaped by social conventions - as displays of 'performance' rather than as 'competence'. As the latter, surely, encapsulates the real tensions that are present for students in their negotiations of the writer's sense of self in the contrasting worlds of the university and the school.

In Chapter 3, Roe Bainton, Penny Clark and Rachel Rimmerman 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' perspectives, these are concerned with messages about themselves, about the function of academic writing; about values and beliefs underpinning institutions. All these messages may create contradictions for students in terms of their own identity. Students inevitably read feedback from their tutors in terms of evaluation of themselves; if they receive feedback indicating that their work is inadequate this 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 students and tutors implicitly make commitments to their views of academic knowledge and how they use the written texts of the conference to position themselves in relation to the academic context of the course. She suggests that in an undergraduate philosophy course, tutors and students take up more traditional roles, whereas in the new environment of the MA course in the Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education 'tutors act more in the role of facilitators, with students assuming more control over their interpretation of what counts as valid academic knowledge.

Lea and Scott see issues of identity and personal knowledge as central to their model of academic literacy which recognizes the value of the beliefs and assumptions about writing and knowledge that students bring to the academy. As both Sierer and McMillan illustrate in their chapters, this is of particular importance in relation to adult learners and no more so than for established professionals. Sierer considers the kinds of problems posed for professional teachers who can find themselves positioned as '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 Harris's model of personal identity formation in offering a socially oriented explanation for the choreography 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 contributors to this volume illustrate repeatedly that in their writing they have been concerned with much more than the reproduction of knowledge. Instead, students in both new and established research 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 his complex and diverse corpus 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 a genre to a certain discipline. These very even within disciplines a reader response ethic will emphasise one set of textual elements, a literary history 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 Klein 1993), the liniments of traditional disciplines. In a set of interrelated studies conducted at the University of Technology, Sydney (Bernhard et al. 1993; Lee et al. 1995; Goggin 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 discipline they are writing themselves into. But I would also like you to keep in your mind's eye the image of the harried first-year nursing student, hurrying from lecture to tutorial, back-up 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 being disciplinary and textual heterogeneity.
Recent advances in the understanding of disciplines and disciplinarity (see Messer-Davidow et al. 1995) emphasize that, rather than being homogeneous communities, academic disciplines are radially heterogeneous and constituted in difference. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ‘practice-based’ or ‘discipline-based’ disciplines of the new 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 such issues as what counts as knowledge, what should be where in the curriculum and how it should be valued, where boundaries within and between disciplines should be drawn. Students are learning to take up writing positions in the context of this diversity and its accompanying tensions. In this chapter I will explore the implications of this approach in the areas of 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 theorization 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 can be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. The second, a ‘contextual’ or ‘discipline-based’ approach assumes a relative homogeneity of discipline, with text types 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 discourse ‘community’. Where the disciplinary positions are conflictual, overlapping or indeed blurred, the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics that is produced. Lee and Stret (Chapter 2) also explore a tripartite 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 practices are crucial to an understanding of academic writing (undertaken as both product and process) and the ways in which students learn to take up powerful writing positions in text. A concept like ‘writing position’ cannot be fully or richly understood without a broad cross-curricular examination of what counts as knowledge and what counts as authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the awareness of internal diversity and conflict, as realized in the politics of the discipline.

So where does the student writer fit in? In the concluding section of this chapter, I will argue that writing pedagogy must take into account all three of the concerns of disciplinarity, disciplinarian and consequent writing positions central – in other words, as Goff (quoted in Kiss 1995) suggests, we must ‘teach the conflicts’.

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 problematizing the social practices of the discipline itself.

Ball et al. (1995: 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 (1995: 12):

What complicates research and pedagogy in writing in the disciplines is the epistemological and disciplinary diversity that exists not only across disciplines, but also within disciplines. As Kenneth Rancio (1987: 353) has argued, though institutional boundaries conventionally demarcate classes of academic work, the situation is actually more complex. There is diversity within disciplines as different types of professionals exist side by side in the same setting. Rancio’s argument is supported by Scott and Kirsche’s (1995) study of the inquiry processes of members from social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. Their study shows that the process of academic inquiry is dynamic, shifting along personal and disciplinary lines, with individual scholars and researchers often crossing disciplinary boundaries to pursue their research questions (cf. Klein 1995). These kinds of lateral moves across fields account in part for the growing diversity within fields.

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

New and emerging disciplinary areas

The authors reviewed so far have been concentrating on the disciplinary traditions of conventional university disciplines. In this chapter, however, I will be presenting case studies of student writing practices in new and emerging areas, where the focus is not on the traditional framework of professions, nurses, adult educators, engineers, what might be called ‘practice-based’ disciplines.

New and emerging areas typically draw on a range of disciplines. Let us take adult education as an example. The adult education theorists Goff (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 imported raw but ‘recontextualized’, in Beaton’s (1990) sense. Within adult education as a field of study there are different schools of thought, with different versions of what counts as knowledge, even among the proponents of the field (Goff 1995: 14). These involve major epistemological cleavages, for example, around positivist, interpretive and postpositivist accounts of knowledge and action. All of this adds up to the disciplinary terrain on which the student adult educator is introduced. To paraphrase Ball et al., where the adult education student is asked ‘to write like an adult educator’ this will be the terrain he/she will learn to inhabit. By mapping out the major dimensions of this terrain, we can develop an account of the ‘disciplinary politics’ of which the student is setting him/herself into.

To illustrate this, I would like to consider nursing education as a case study.

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

Nursing education: a case study

One of the significant issues in nursing education has been the shift, over the last decade or so, from a ‘practice-oriented’ to a ‘professionalized’ conception of nursing (see Goff and Pratt 1995: 109). This has coincided with the shift of nursing training/education out of the hospitals and into the universities. So one aspect of the disciplinary politics of nursing is presently this shift from practice-oriented to professionalized conceptions of nursing (see Goff and Pratt 1995: 109). This has coincided with the shift of nursing training/education out of the hospitals and into the universities. So one aspect of the disciplinary politics of nursing is presently this shift from practice-oriented to professionalized conceptions of nursing. Another union which is central to nursing education is that between practical knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Like adult education, nursing draws on a heterogeneous disciplinary base, most strikingly in the contrast between the science-based, clinical subjects and the ethical subjects. Underlying these subjects are very different understandings of what it means to be a professional, the clinical subjects being underpinned by the positivist scientific paradigm, the ethical subjects by an interpretive or post-postmodern perspective on what counts as knowledge. The shift into academic training/education produces in turn processes of disciplinization, where nursing is presumed to constitute itself as a scientific discipline. (Again there are interesting parallels with adult education as a field of study.) As Webb (1992: 175) suggests:
Table 1.1: The disciplinary politics of nursing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice-based</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Proactive knowledge</th>
<th>Theoretical knowledge</th>
<th>Homogeneous discipline base</th>
<th>Heterogeneous discipline base</th>
<th>Clinical subjects (positional)</th>
<th>Ethical subjects (interpretative/critical)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Processes of disciplinarity: nursing as a 'proper' discipline; nurse educators as 'proper' academics</td>
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Nursing is a relatively young academic discipline. Like other disciplines which have attempted to establish respect and credibility, such as philosophy and sociology, nursing has sought to do this by instantiating longer-established disciplines and in particular the traditional or physical sciences. Underpinning all of this is the gender politics of nursing, the construction of nursing as a handmaiden profession in relation to its sister, 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'll be bridged. This puts students in an interesting position. It is probably less problematic now but 4-5 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 prac-ticing, that has started to change but the trauma remains.

I think these tensions reflect the tension for nursing because the university seems to be teaching people about all these airy-fairy 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 that people that operate in the practical 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 cleavages between the positivist and interpretative or postpositivist approaches, while arguing for their interrelatedness in the nursing education curriculum:

I'm not so sure that nursing is so well established as an academic discipline that it is 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 distinct and self-contained approaches to understanding nursing and that 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 so clear, though I would certainly have some sympathy with those views that derive from the post-positivist epistemologies, post-structural thinking. Although I'm not always in agreement with them or they are applied to nursing, but my background would be more akin to those approaches.

Another lecturer speaks more specifically 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 we've done things like important skills to develop a student's thinking, their critical writing skills, there is much less emphasis on how to structure arguments. 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 thinking, ethics and law and critical thinking and the humanities, the meaning of caring, the meaning of being a person. So the assignments that I had to mark were really bad. I thought, I can't believe that these people in the third year of their programme and they cannot write, they cannot think, they cannot critique or question. So there was a real dilemma for me and I think that was the tension for the faculty, we had this strange background between one group of people feeling that one campus wasn't teaching how to nurse and the other

(Lecturer interview)

So how do student experience the disciplinary tensions between nursing as a science-based curriculum and in its ethical, humanistic dimension? The following student expresses her surprise about the range of what counted as an appropriate role 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 problem, new drugs, etc. But I was surprised they have a lot of articles based on hazards happening in the workplace, nurses' perception of patients, nurses' ideas about dealings 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 have to write about care for a person with AIDS, you either know or you don't know. This seminar we had a case on cardiac failure and that was another one where you have to go and read how the heart works, how it pumps, where 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 too 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 handmaids, which I always felt, I felt that was never being argued enough about but I know 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 to, but we were never taught why nurses need autonomy, why you should feel that you have a decision to make about your patient's 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 tension between postmodern and hermeneutic versions of what counts as knowledge, the shift towards professionalization of nursing, the emphasis on nursing as a 'proper' academic discipline are commonalities within which the student are writing. I will illustrate this in the next section with an example from a first-year undergraduate 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 emphasizes how many ways 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.

Academic Writing in New Disciplinary Areas
Here are some examples of the two contrasting ways in which the student writers articulated statements in their essays. The first is an articulation based on empirical research, the second is based on theoretical research typically:

Lack of sufficient autonomy and authority in nursing is seen as occurring when a nurse has to have a physician authority on duty in the unit to sign off on the patient’s care plan. Some physicians believe that nurses need to be left to their own devices, they are not responsible enough to make decisions on their own.

In contrast, the second way is based on the critique of the first approach, which suggests that nurses are not being given enough autonomy and authority to make decisions on their own.

(Kristen)

Kristen’s statement about nurses’ need for autonomy and authority, in which nurses are seen as too dependent on physicians, is significantly reinforced when the writer uses the “personal communication” referencing convention to reference a particular statement, based on experience from the field rather than from an academic source. Immediately following this, Kristen articulates a statement by saying it to the reader.

According to Kerkert (1986) nurses have been making independent decisions regarding management of their patients without wanting to accept accountability for the quality of care provided.

So Kristen’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 Kristen’s essay, Dunn’s essay draws on both the theoretical framework and the academic sources. Dunn, on the other hand, makes a more direct argument that nurses should be recognized as professionals.

Ironically, Beaumont (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 Schulenberg (1986, cited in Collins and Henderson 1991: 25) claims that nurses prefer to work in an environment which encourages autonomous practice. Furthermore, Schoen (1992) confirmed their claims and concluded that a number of research findings indicating that nurses do not have a clear role in the decision-making process.

In response to Dunn’s essay, nurses may be distinguished by the nature of their professional role, their position in the organization, and the level of responsibility they are expected to assume.

(Karen)

In Dunn’s essay we find evidence both of the academic sourcing strategy, with quoted statements attributed to sources, and the unattributed appeal to experience.

Nurses believe that this is not true and that doctors should be educated to have a greater appreciation of nursing theory and practice, that decision making processes should be reviewed and that changes in hospital administration could ease tension between nurses and doctors.

Karen’s essay is one of the most highly rated by the reader, as it does not rely heavily on the double academic sourcing strategy which she saw in Sue and Lorraine’s essay.

Mark’s essay: thematic argument

Mark’s essay is one of the most highly rated by the reader (A+) and it does not rely heavily on the double academic sourcing strategy which she saw in Sue and Lorraine’s essay.

Due to the fact that the nursing profession is so diverse and complex, there are so many factors that can affect nurses’ performance. For example, nurses need to be aware of their own limitations and be able to delegate tasks to others when necessary.

Dunn’s apparent adoption of the impersonalized, unattributed academic voice is discredited because the reader is left to draw their own conclusions from the statements made.

On the other hand, Dunn’s essay uses a personal voice, which allows the reader to feel involved in the argument and to see the personal consequences of the issues raised.

So even though Dunn’s essay may not be considered as strong as Kristen’s, his use of personal voice makes for a more engaging essay for the reader.

Mark’s essay is well structured and coherently argues for the need for nurses to have more autonomy and authority in their decision-making process.

Instead, what Mark seems to do is to highlight the argument, concentrating on what is used as evidence in the paper. For instance, Mark is not as concerned with the choice of sources, but rather with the way they are used to support the argument. He also places more emphasis on the personal voice, suggesting that this is a more effective way of engaging the reader.
to back up or elaborate an argumentative position that he has already introduced. The strategy is therefore quite different from that of Wiss or Lorraine 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 Coggins (1990). The skills-based approach to the teaching of academic writing assumes that there was a generic set of skills and strategies that can be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts. The text-based approach assumes a relatively homogenous discipline, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. I am suggesting, in line with writers such as Ball 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 ‘passing’ – representations of disciplinary authority which post them as essentially passive in relation to the work in hand – we must begin to make visible and available the machineries which produce the university’s disciplines and its multiple discourses.

(Ball et al. 1990: 157)

Where the disciplinary positions are contested, overlapping or indeed blurred (see Geertz, 1973, cited in Klein 1983) 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, disciplinization and consequent writing positions central – in other words, as Geertz (quoted in Klein 1983) suggests, we must ‘teach the conflicts’.

As I suggested earlier in the nurse education case study, a major conflict is between, on the one hand, the practice-orientated account of nursing and the experiential ways 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 those conflicts work within the texts examined earlier, producing at one moment highly valued, if dodgy, texts in the impersonalized disciplinary voice (Sue and Lorraine’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 comment. The less successful essays (Karen and Deirdre’s) appear to fail both in making authoritative statements in the impersonalized disciplinary voice and in the generalized experiential voice of ‘what nurses think’. Mark’s essay seems to theme around within the text both the professionalized account and the impersonalized disciplined account of nursing. While appearing somewhat unconventional, i.e. not dodgy, in terms of the conventions of academic writing, it is highly valued by the marker.

It is worth noting that the tensions and conflicts between the experiential/practice-based voice and the impersonalized disciplinary voice and the consequent availability of writing positions are a major theme of the work of Kress and others (see Kress and Van Leeuwen 1985) and critical language awareness approaches to the teaching and learning of academic writing, as they are in Ball et al. (1990) and, indeed, are taken up by other writers in this volume (see Steiner, Chapter 11). Here they map very specifically on to the shifts of nursing into the academy with its consequent professionalization and disciplinization. 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 divide.

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 her the skills to quote and reference effectively). It provides a complement here in which the student academic writer can explore the writing/disciplinary/subject positions that are available along with the areas of blurring, overlap and conflict that create difficulties and choices in taking up an authoritative position in writing.

Conclusion: intrinsic and embodied readings

An underlying theme of this chapter has been, in a sense, how lecturers/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 ways 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 as, for example, incorporating wordings and meanings into text. They will be in a greater or lesser extent have available to them the technological technologies to do so. An embodied reading is one that reads the text as an embodiment of the disciplinary politics within which it is produced, and as an embodiment of the processes of subject production at work in learner writers engage with the writing demands of the discipline. In this chapter I argue that such embodied readings are an essential basis for academic writing pedagogy.
Student Writing and Staff Feedback in Higher Education: An Academic Literacies Approach

Mary R. Lea and Brian V. Street

Introduction

The opinion is often expressed that standards of student 'literacy' are falling, whether at school or in higher education; many academic staff claim that students can no longer write. 'Back to basics' ideas are now fast taking hold in today's higher education. Recently, we received an award from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council to conduct a research project entitled Perspectives on Academic Literacies: An Institutional Approach that attempted to look at these issues in more depth. The research looked at perceptions and practices of student writing in higher education, taking as case studies one new and one traditional university in southeast England. Against the background of numerous changes in higher education in the UK and increasing numbers of non-traditional entrants, this research has been concerned with a sober institutional approach to student writing, rather than patting 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, the 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...
The research

During 1996-98 we carried out research at two universities, one new and one traditional, in south-east England. Ten interviews were conducted with such staff at the universities, and 25 interviews with 25 students interviewed, either individually or in small groups. At the two universities, 15 members of academic staff and 35 students were interviewed in the same way. The interviews at both institutions included the directions 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 (Geoff and Brian 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, verbal feedback on students' work and handouts on 'essay' 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 draw on in our research. Indeed, the results showed that we could draw on them as a source of data and inform our conclusions about the significance of the textual analysis we undertook.

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 given social circumstances. In such an approach, therefore, what is most important is to generalize, and for establishing the 'representativeness' of social data. Misconstrues what he terms 'analytical induction'.

In the present context, the issues and students whom we interviewed and the documents we collected can be taken as case studies of different perspectives on academic literacies. While not representing a sample from which generalizations can be drawn regarding the whole of English higher education, these case studies can point to important theoretical questions and connections that might otherwise be raised. The data, for instance, enable us to explore the hypothesis that, viewed as an 'academic hierarchy', the beliefs and practices of tutors and students constitute a certain 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' understandings of the writing process at levels of epistemology, authority and context orientation over knowledge than at the level of technical skills, surface linguistic competence or cultural assumptions. 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 'cumulative induction.'

The unstructured, in-depth interviews examined how students understood the different literacy practices which they experience in their studies and in what ways academic staff understood the literacy requirements of their own subject area and make these explicit to their students. We gave participants the opportunity to reflect upon the writing practices of the different courses, the time and place to consider what influences were being brought to bear upon them not only in their present studies but also in their past studies. We asked staff to outline, as they see them, the writing requirements of their subject area and which aspects of these students' written work; course handbooks; assignment guidelines. A further objective of our research was to contribute to the debate about the institutional understandings of academic literacy practices in higher education, and we therefore began the project with a focus upon the three academic categories: humanities; social sciences; and natural sciences. In both universities we gathered qualitative data on students' written work; course handbooks; assignment guidelines. A further objective of our research was to contribute to the debate about the institutional understandings of academic literacy practices in higher education, and we therefore began the project with a focus upon the three academic categories: humanities; social sciences; and natural sciences. In both universities we gathered qualitative data on students' written work; course handbooks; assignment guidelines. The integrated a number of disciplinary approaches and write the writing requirements of these exercises were discussed and agreed in most cases with the students the students who wrote them.

Additionally, some academic staff were teaching in courses where the traditional disciplines were looking at new ways of teaching that discipline outside the academic community. Developing new ways of writing, discipline was often included in a session for the students on how to write effectively. We would expect that it is frequently very difficult for students to 'read off' from any course what might be the specific academic requirements of this course. Nor are these pages below, did the provision of general assignments about the nature of academic writing help students in the specification of demands in such contexts.

We also interviewed learning support staff in both institutions. The data collected from these interviews reinforced the views expressed by students that many of the difficulties they experienced with writing were conflicting and contrasting requirements for writing on different courses and from the fact that these requirements were frequently left implicit. Learning support staff also questioned whether academic staff were aware that they were asking for specific ways of writing. Knowledge from their students.

Requirements of student writing:

Staff interpretations

The interviews with staff would suggest that academic staff have their own frameworks for viewing the written signs regarding what constitutes a good piece of student writing in the courses in which they teach. These tend to reflect different views on the nature of the written text, the organization and layout and to such apparently different components of rational essay writing as 'introduction', 'arguments', or 'conclusions'. Their own disciplinary histories had a clear influence on their conceptualizations and representations of what was of the utmost importance in writing. This influence was reflected not only in the nature of the content, but also in the form, to which students often have recourse when describing what constitutes a sophisticated piece of writing. That is to say, underlying, often disciplinary, assumptions about the nature of knowledge affected the way in which these signs were given to the students.

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 assignment. At this level of form, one tutor is able to explain clearly what he means by...
I need my students to have an introduction which sets the scene and a main body which covers a number of issues highlighted in the introduction and introduces some theory, application and analysis. Students need to be critical, to evaluate, to try and reach some sort of synthesis and then to simply summarise and conclude. You need a good solid introduction leading into your main body, and each part of your essay should stand on its own and will be called and will link with the text. It will have a professional feel about it and will not describe but will critically analyse, and then it will feed into a summary and conclusion.

However, the descriptive words ‘evaluate’, ‘critically analyse’, ‘students’, ‘teach a synthesis’ - could not be explained further. As another lecturer put it:

I know a good essay when I see it but I cannot describe how to write it.

This lends credence to the idea that elements successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world, and not to a set of generic writing skills as the study skills model would suggest. A successful university lecturer is likely to have spent many years developing acceptable ways of constructing their own knowledge through their own writing practices in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Other writers have explained in some detail how writing practices construct rather than merely reproduce (Fetterman, 2001; Goodwin and Hoey, 1995). Those practices, then, are integrally related to the ways in which staff construct and maintain their own academic knowledge. Faced with writing which does not appear to make sense within their own academic framework, they are most likely to have recourse to what feels like familiar descriptive categories such as ‘structure and argument’, ‘clarity and ‘academia’, in order to give feedback on their students’ writing. In reality their own understandings of these categories may be bound by their own individual disciplinary perspectives, but may be no less meaningful outside this framework and therefore not readily understood by students unversed in that particular orientation of the discipline. Our later analysis of a student essay illustrates this in some detail.

Writing requirements: student interpretations

The research interviews with students revealed a number of different interpretations and understandings of what students thought that they were meant to be doing in their writing. Students described taking ‘ways of knowing’ (Baker et al., 1995) and of writing from one course into another only to find that their attempt to do so was unsuccessful and met with negative feedback. Students were consciously aware of switching between different writing requirements and knew that their task was to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require. This was a more complex level than prose, such as the ‘essay’ or ‘report’, bring more deeply to writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting.

of a traditional essay, while other sources comment ‘I do not want to know what you are going to say’. Many different conventions were to be found around the use of the first person pronoun in student writing. Even within the same module, individual tutors had different opinions about when or if it was appropriate to use this. Such conventions were often presented as self-evident by the correct way in which things should be done. Students’ perceptions were influenced by their own experiences of writing within and outside higher education. An example of this was the A level exam which came unstuck when she wrote a history essay drawing on just one source while she was regularly and successfully had done in English. Similarly, a BTEC course had in its first year was used to extensive subject report writing, but, whereas the first one had a traditional essay form, as part of a course in public administration and management, he had no idea how to go about writing a report of work.

Students took different approaches to the course writing that they experienced. Some saw it as a kind of game, trying to workshop the rules, not only for a field of study, a particular course or particular assignment, but for a wider and informal network. They adopted writing strategies that masked their own opinions, in a sense mimicking utilitarian or overtly expressed views or ideas. Their views were, for instance, the historicist historians who had learned to hide what they thought behind ‘it can be said’ rather than using the first person in their writing, and had also learned how to balance one representation against another in a way to present their own personal viewpoint in their writing. On the other hand, a mature student writing social policies felt severely constrained by his inability to bring his years of trade union experience into his essay on present-day poverty. He did not feel comfortable with the pragmatist and their own assumptions about the rules of the game, which seemed to require him simply to juxtapose data from different sources and to echo personal knowledge.

Relations around student writing: interpreting feedback

So far, we have attempted to outline some of the limitations in the research data concerning curricular variation in the different interpretations and understandings of student writing we encountered. These variations exist within and across courses, subjects and disciplines - and between students and academic tutors in many different contexts. They are combined both in the disparate forms of the text - the accompanying assignments and the accompanying feedback - and in the social relations that exist around them - the relationships of power and authority between tutor and student - and they are conditioned and emergent literary practices integral to text construction. Central to our understanding of both the varieties of academic literary practices which students engage across the university and the relations which exist around text production is an examination of the ways in which written feedback is interpreted by the students.

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

One useful way of examining the relationships around texts may, thus, be to start by examining the feedback generated by staff in terms of its genre, by examining some of the genres of students’ written work and the genres of staff feedback on it we may be able to make some move on the complex ways in which staff and students construct appropriate ways of knowing and reproduce appropriate forms of disciplinary and subject knowledge. There is a dynamic within the feedback genre, for instance, which works to both construct academic knowledge and maintain relationships of power and authority between novice student and experienced academic. Assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge may be inferred by reading feedback, but frequently such assumptions remain implicit, as in the feedback on the essays analysed above.

The ways in which speakers or writers indicate their implicit commitment to the truth of what is being said - what linguists refer to as ‘modality’ - vary with types of text and social relations (see Lea, Chapter 4, for a further discussion of modality). Tutors comments frequently take the form of what we term ‘categorical modality’, using imperatives and assertions with little mitigation or qualification. The first page of the student anthropology essay analysed above has the following comments: ‘Eg 9·1 does not show much linkage’ ‘Too unethical - see point on ‘Linkage’’. Too much unlinked facts here. Can’t see argument. This categorical modality is also expressed here and frequently in the essays we have seen by means of orthographical marks such as ‘? ’, ‘?’ or ‘( )’, indicating disagreement, doubt, criticism. The ‘?’ frequently indicates not a genuine question which tutor and student are engaged in explicating, but rather it is used as a kind of expletive, or as a categorical assertion that the point is not ‘correct’. In the essay in question there are nine unmarked question marks, many with this function, and its bracket signs ‘( )’ indicating links that should have been made, in the space of 32 pages. One
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 condemned with technical matters in which "appropriate" skills are acquired and exercised because students become members of expert communities, as in the first two models described above (see Figure 2.1). The third model, that of academic literacies, from which we are viewing these data, suggests a more complex and nuanced interpretation, in which the processes of student writing and tutor feedback are defined through implicit assumptions about what constitutes valid knowledge within a particular context, and the relationships of authority that exist around the communication of these assumptions. The nature of this authority and the claims associated with it can be identified through both formal, linguistic features of the writing involved and in the social and institutional relationships associated with it.

During the course of the research we have identified three thematic categories originating from both students and staff as ways of looking at students' writing. The first is focused on the student and suggests that students lack a set of basic skills that can be dealt with primarily in remedial study skills or learning support. 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 assessment criteria, tutor feedback on students' written work and, for the students themselves, the importance of their own 'identity' as writers rather than simply skills in becoming an academic writer. The third theme is as a broadly institutional level and concerns the implications of modularity, assessment and university procedures on student writing.

These three themes, focused broadly on students, student-tutor interactions, and the institution, now need to be examined more fully against the changing 'fields of study' and student '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 move 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,
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 computerized and graded. The difference is that she uses the 'process approach' to the teaching of writing, which involves a lot of dealing, discussion and refeeding 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, by contrast, works in an academic support programme, running workshops and individual tutorials designed to support students in the writing they are required to do across the curriculum. This provision is not compulsory, but available to any student choosing to take advantage of it. Work undertaken on the academic sup-
port 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;
- implications for student 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 detailed 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. Those tutors who give minimal responses perhaps see the task of marking 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 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. It is often clear that subject teachers organize their courses in such a way that they have time to see their students' writing in progress, enormously desirable

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Table 3.1 Nine different styles of response to student writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutor</th>
<th>Specific comments</th>
<th>General comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A grade only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor B</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Three free writes in black intro at the end of the essay, plus grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor C</td>
<td>An occasional tick in the margin in red ink</td>
<td>Sign free writes in red intro at the end of essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor D</td>
<td>27 numbers on the text in pencil, with handwritten notes in pencil on a separate sheet</td>
<td>More than 25 lines at the beginning of the word-processed notes, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor E</td>
<td>28 numbers on the text in pencil, with word-processed notes at the end of a natural text, to be discussed in a natural</td>
<td>&quot;Fair&quot; at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor A</td>
<td>Comments and corrections in pencil, across the top of the text, in the margin, and on the top of the last page</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 B</td>
<td>Comments and corrections in pencil, across the top of the text, in the margin, and on the top of the last page</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 subject tutor A to write something to support that grade. Subject tutors vary enormously, however, in whether and how much they respond to the details of what the students have written. Subject tutors A and B appear not to see any purpose in reading and responding to their students' writing other than to contribute to the assessment process. Subject tutors D and E, by contrast, provide a large quantity of numbered comments to the text itself - so many, in fact, that they are written on a

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symbol of teachers' genuine knowledge and their right to make unchallengeable judgements. The black box 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 I 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 inflexible. They 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 given by 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 particularly 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 undermined by the use of the personal pronoun.
(3) K. . . . M . . . is not an established authority - nor yet, anyway.
(4) Avoid the use of personal nouns and expressions like 'in my view' in all academic work.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?
SUBJECT TUTOR D
Specific Comments
(1) Unnecessary words.
(2) This paragraph contains many points each of which you could discuss in more detail.
(3) and? These are the same thing!
(4) Whatever 'poetic' means! This is culturally and historically determined.
(5) means the same: avoid unnecessary repetition.
(6) You already made this up in the last para.
(7) This part in brackets needs explaining, difficult for whom? which diachrony?
(8) Good point!
(9) Good to mention values. Here you only talk about the value people place on different types of language: wider social values affect language choice too, e.g. value assigned to woman, 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 'fit' the system better than others.
(22) Good point. Not necessarily 'stumble' here, but moving with the times.
(25) So has one say the older form had higher 'quality'?
(24) OK, but it's important to separate this argument from the one about language systems.
Teaching grammar does not necessarily improve language use.
(27) Important point.
(28) You should also say you have used your reading by making references in the text.
(29) There are some good points here, but a lot of confusion too. I hope my notes help you to write more clearly.

SUBJECT TUTOR E
General Comment
(1) It is clear that you have considered the topic seriously and you have identified and illustrated three very important ways in which learners encounter frustration.
(2) Moreover you suggest a number of measures that teachers could take to avoid such learner frustration.
(3) I wanted you to consider how much additional detail about these measures and I feel that, although your analysis stems from your HTA, some of your proposals are more theoretical than they are practical.
(4) I wanted you to write more about how you intend to operationalise your ideas.
(5) I think you rather unfairly make the teacher to be the 'villain' and the 'transgressor' and the learner the aggrieved, innocent 'victim'.
(6) I am thus a bit worried about the balance of your assignment.
(7) I quite agree that it is right and proper that learners' rights and preferred learning strategies are respected but I wonder if you do not somewhat underestimate the extent to which it is the responsibility of the teacher and the institution to build on what learners bring to the classroom in attempting to augment these skills and knowledge.
(8) There are one or two occasions when I find it difficult to follow your logic and sometimes I feel your argument hyperbole relies on an emotional appeal rather than on effective and considered thought.
(9) However, I suppose we all have such feelings and I feel rather charitably 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.
Specific Comments
(1) Yes, what you claim is true but there's something that makes me feel rather uncomfortable about your opening statement and I'll take a long time to figure out what I think it is that worries me. I've finally come to the conclusion that it is the juxtaposition of the two ideas that you mention. This seems to me to suggest a teachers versus learners' scenario. If your intended readership is ELF personnel in your own country then I wonder if you too might not feel somewhat alienated by what amounts to a criticism of teachers.
(2) I'm not sure what you mean by 'full learning'.
(3) Is this a conscious or unconscious action on the part of the learner? If the latter, to what degree should the learner be held responsible? Similarly, if a teacher unconsciously affects learning adversely, to what degree should s/he be held responsible? Are the two situations comparable in adjudging culpability? An interesting question.
(4) What other things? A new paragraph would be helpful here.
(23) Yes, this seems unfair.
(24) True but inadequate control of grammar can equally easily lead to communicative breakdown. It doesn't seem productive to put the two in opposition. Maybe better seen as complementary.
(25) Good supporting quote.
(26) Correction of factual content is certainly more prominent in real-life interactions.
(27) I don't think I personally would include this as an 'oral activity'.
(28) Therefore maybe there ought to be a gap between the asking of a question and the response.

EAP TUTOR B
Specific Comments
(1) Puts it in the margin.
(2) Writes 'Are you sure?' in the margin beside a factual comment.
(3) Crosses out and rewrites.
(4) Writes 'incomplete sentence'.
(5) Puts a tick in the margin.
(6) Writes 'who?' above a pronoun.
(7) Puts 'sp.' to indicate misspellings.
(8) Writes 'not clear' in the margin.
(9) Puts a very long line in the margin.

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??
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 wasn’t sure what you mean by
I don’t think I personally would
I fear.

This seems to me to suggest

The EAP tutors in our sample do not put a grade on the work to which they respond. Responding to tutor B, he, eventually, is required to recommend a grade on the best draft, but at this point she does not want to give an indication of what that 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 area of things which are particularly the prerogative of subject tutors to judge.

There is, we suggest, a continuum from the sort of academic assignment which clearly requires an 'ideal answer' in the form of open-ended assignment in which a wide range of answers are possible. The majority of assignments in the social sciences are probably at the open-ended pole of the continuum; this is certainly the case for the assignments in our sample. However, even

for open-ended assignments, tutors often indicate that what the student has written falls short in some way of what they would have judged as 'good' or 'ideal'. Subject tutor B gives a hint that there is an ideal way of answering, if not an ideal answer, by writing: '[you] don't really answer the question'. There are some hints in subject tutor D's response; comments 21 and 24 are telling the student what she should have written on these specific topics, and comment 28 is telling her something about how she should have written the essay. Subject tutor E also indicates what she would have preferred him more notice the expressions in his general comments 'I wanted you to...

be more detailed' (sentence 3) and 'I wanted to know more about' (sentence 5). In his detailed comment 28 he indicates what he would have judged as 'correct' or 'good' when he writes 'Therefore, maybe there ought to be...

These show the student that there was something different she might have written which would have been better in the tutor's eyes.

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

Correct or edit the student's work

Compared with the two previous categories, very few of the subject tutors' comments in our sample are aimed at correcting errors in the students' work; perhaps only subject tutor D's comments 3, and subject tutor E's comments 7, 9, 6, 21, 22 and 25 all engage with the content of what the student has written, but they are full of suggestions that what she put in the first place was insufficient, controversial or wrong.

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 concepts with the student, but it is always channelled in terms of a debate or correction, not disagreement with what the student has written. Her comments 4, 7, 9, 11, 21, 22 and 25 all engage with the content of what the student has written, but there are indications that what she put in the first place was insufficient, controversial or wrong.

In addition, some comments can be seen as advice for future essays, even if not phrased as such. For example, several of subject tutor D's negative comments could be interpreted in ways which are sufficiently general as to constitute advice for writing a future essay. Obvious examples are comments 1, 5 and 36 – criticisms of this essay which amount to guidelines to be followed for all essays. The EAP tutors do not make any overt mention of learning from this essay for the future. However, several of their comments can be associated with general advice: most of EAP tutor 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 in a particular place.
5. Decide 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, none of the subject tutors in our sample were responding to drafts of essays, so strictly speaking this category is irrelevant for them. However, subject tutors sometimes respond as if the student were going to rewrite the essay. Subject tutor 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 process in responding to student writing has a powerful shaping effect on the nature of their comments. Even though the comment is subjective, it can often be interpreted as advice or error correction. 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.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This? 52

Table 7.2: Focus on justifying grades in subject tutor's comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Parts of response which best show the function of justifying grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>The whole document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>The whole document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>The whole document, most of the detailed document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, some comments can be seen as advice for future essays, even if not phrased as such. For example, several of subject tutor D's negative comments could be interpreted in ways which are sufficiently general as to constitute advice for writing a future essay. Obvious examples are comments 1, 5 and 36 – criticisms of this essay which amount to guidelines to be followed for all essays. The EAP tutors do not make any overt mention of learning from this essay for the future. However, several of their comments can be associated with general advice: most of EAP tutor D's comments could be translated into a checklist of things for the learner to consider in many places in many essays, for example:

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5. Decide 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.
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The possible messages students may receive from different types of response

Turner’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 frustrated by brief ones. Often they complained 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 asking for further ‘validation’ by detailed responses an anxiety-producing approach. In their view, the danger was that they might become anxious about receiving feedback that was not what they expected. Hence the need for some such responses continuing, do not appreciate their purposes and are unable to benefit fully from them.

Messages about themselves

Messages about university values and beliefs

Messages about academic writing

Messages about subject staff development

Implications for subject staff development

We are all reluctant to make changes in our work practices unless we can find reasons for the changes (Fullan 1992). 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, etc. It needs to address their beliefs (for example, about their role as educators), their values (for example, about what is worth their time to spend time on), and their understandings (for example, about the nature of the writing process) and not just their practices and not just what they do, but why they believe that they do it in that way. So, for example, if tutors say that they believe students already know how to write cases, or that they would not have gained a place in higher education, workshops could explore tutors’ own experiences of learning to write, and the barriers they faced on the road to academic community membership. If tutors say that they feel under pressure to prioritize research and publication, and that giving detailed feedback on student writing would take more time than they could spare, workshops could encourage them to look at the amount of time they currently do, and/or do any of the tasks mentioned, and that the students are able to make of the kinds of comments and markings put on their work. This could lead them to find tasks that they will do less of, or to find new ones to do at all.

In our experience, staff could benefit from being more made aware of their own personal beliefs. Following are some points which are particularly worth considering for staff development courses:

• Be clear that you are reviewing your own personal beliefs and not someone else’s; the discussion is about your own beliefs.

• Encourage tutors to be aware of the way they learn and their beliefs about how students learn.

• Encourage the discussion of the subject of belief and how beliefs can influence our practices.

• Encourage tutors to reflect on their own beliefs and to consider how these beliefs may influence their practices.

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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 Ibars 1991; Clark et al 1996). This would include helping them to develop strategies for finding out what criteria will be operating in the assessment of their writing, what styles of response their tutors use, and what they are supposed to make of them. One way of doing this is for students to look at past essays from particular courses, respond to and 'evaluate' them, and then look at and discuss the tutor's comments and evaluation.

The kinds of comments we have identified from both subject tutors and EAP tutors suggest that much useful feedback can be given as communication by an interested reader without drawing on specific 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 practices; those of us working in this area should be concerned with the actual tasks which students are currently engaged in, and should examine those 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

Note

1. The ideas in this chapter originated in an activity conducted by Rachel at Lancaster University in which a group of undergraduate students analysed some tutors' comments on a class assignment. Rachel then presented some of the issues and outcomes at the Teaching of Writing Group. Anne and Sue developed these into a workshop for a colloquium at the Communication Skills Unit, University of Durham. We are grateful to the students involved, other members of the Teaching of Writing Group and colleagues at the for their contribution 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 online 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 1993, 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 (Geider 1994; Sierer 1997; Lea and Street 1995). Other authors in this volume explore the notion that academic literacy practices are central to the construction of academic knowledge (Burcham, Chapter 1; Paech, Chapter 8; McMillan, Chapter 5; Sierer, Chapter 11). I draw on
a similar theoretical perspective in order to examine learning in these new environments and suggest that we need to understand more about the kinds of literacy practices that students engage 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 it is playing in the process of learning and teaching?

Computer conferencing is being used by academic staff in higher education in a number of different ways. It can be an integral part of course design where the course is actually delivered online, either completely or partially. In this instance students have no choice about whether to contribute to the 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 and 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, postgraduate research students studying at a distance. The way in which a conference is being used will depend in part upon the nature of the course and whether it is being delivered in a face-to-face or distance situation. I illustrate 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.

A4E5: 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 conference 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 and to try out the conceptions of philosophical arguments.

Students also have access to a national conference for A4E5 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.

H082: Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education is a rather different course to A4E5. It is a module of the Open University's MA in open and distance learning and it is delivered primarily via the Web. This course uses a Web-based electronic bulletin board system for conferencing, and the conferencing is used as a major site of learning for participants on the course. Students are divided into four different tutor groups, with tutors acting as 'facilitators'. Unlike traditional print-based distance learning courses, students on this course have little in the way of ready-prepared printed material. Instead they have access to Web-based discussion lists and links to other relevant Web-based course materials. Additionally, as an integral part of the course, students are required to keep a diary concerning the use of conferencing when setting their assignments. The course guide suggests that:

The amount of time you will spend reading text material is much reduced from normal OU courses, and the amount of time you will spend in practical activities, on-line 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 Grafton (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 Grafton 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 verbal and written codes in order to become successful participants in these conference settings.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the relationship between these two codes. It shows the conference desktop which uses the Open University's First Class internet conferencing system. Students enter the tutor conference for their tutor on A4E5 by clicking on the appropriate icon—for example, A4E5 Jan's comp. One. 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, A4E5 Equity, Philosophers' Chat (the icon for which does not appear directly on this desktop) is designated for non-academic matters, not directly related to the substantive content of the course. Below these icons, representing different areas of the course, students and tutors make their contributions. Clicking on the message icons 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 H082. It, too, has its own designated tutor group areas and a plenary discussion area for general course issues and students can contribute to the 'Call' on more social chat issues. Notice the welcome message from one of the course tutors:

At first sight these created spaces appear neutral and arbitrary, merely a place within which written communication can take place between students and tutors, 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 is. Participants have choices to make about where to post messages—in which space or room. Students and tutors can take on a number of different roles and identities depending upon the choices that they make around time and space when to post, how much, and so forth. They may choose to compose a detailed message online or to make an informal reply to a posting. The conference structure results in participants being in a variety of practices; these practices have implications for the kind of knowledge that is eventually recorded as a conference contribution, and, therefore, for knowledge being codified within the conference setting. If students feel confident that their contributions are 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 postings to the tutor conference and post to the national A4E5 Equity 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 conference 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 invaluable, however, when exploring the social contexts of computer-mediated communication. (1994) illustrates the importance of the speech community, the speech situation, the speech event and the speech act. He suggests that we need to
be concerned with speakers' shared conceptualized knowledge of the different elements that go to make up a speech act, including writing; setting; purpose; structure; norm; context; according to the conference. To get a more complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference, an analysis of the network of interaction and interpretation sessions. To get the complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference, an analysis of the network of interaction and interpretation sessions. To get the complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference, an analysis of the network of interaction and interpretation sessions. To get the complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference, an analysis of the network of interaction and interpretation sessions.
Epistemic modality and conference contributions

In order to explore the ways in which students negotiate academic knowledge through writing in the conference, I will use here the concept of 'modality' as a tool with which we can begin to examine the ways in which students position themselves in relation to knowledge in the conference. Modality is a term used by social linguists to indicate a speaker's attitude towards a proposition. Focus is often placed upon the use of modal auxiliaries such as 'true', 'must', 'could', 'should' and 'need' in order to indicate a speaker's attitude towards what they are saying. The use of categorical auxiliaries such as 'is', 'are', 'do', 'does', 'will', 'can', 'may', 'will', as in the sentence 'the truth of what is being said', is not considered in this framework. I have found that the use of modal auxiliaries in the conference is significant, as it indicates the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed.

In the conference, the use of modal auxiliaries can be seen as a way of negotiating the truth of the propositions expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed. Although the use of modal auxiliaries can indicate a level of confidence in the truth of the proposition, it does not necessarily mean that the speaker is completely confident or lacks confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. It shows that there is a degree of negotiation between the speaker and the audience in terms of the authority of the proposition expressed.
she comes to discuss 'prior knowledge' she again seems very committed to the 'truth' of what she is saying: 'it is very subjective', 'I emphasise', 'I use' and 'I do know'. She appears to be confident about her presentation of academic content because of her own previous experience in this field. Her engagement with a 'collaborative learning' as an academic concept but it also feels as if the conference is giving her the space to contribute with a strong commitment to what she is saying. This appears to contrast with the previous student's expectation of being 'inactive'. Of course, on H802 students are not merely learning about collaborative learning; it is clearly what they are doing. They are not having to make decisions in their conference writing between academic content and 'using the conference', as is the case in courses with more traditional academic content, such as A23.

Linking conferences and assessment

A novel feature of H802 is that explicit linkages are made between confer-
ence contributions and assessed written work. In this respect, then, students are expec-
ted to use 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 complete for assessment. This is in contrast with A23 where, although the intention is that students will make implicit connections between what is learnt in the conference and their assignments, no formal assessment procedures link the two.

Students on 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 embodied particular relationships between both tutors and students and students and students. Additionally, I have indicated in an earlier chapter that the conferences are characterised by different levels of modality, which are related to both participants' commitment to, and their own understanding of, academic knowledge. I have also sug-
gested ways in which the conferences support collaborative learning in a greater or lesser extent. Arguably the conferences embed new forms of writ-
ing, new genres with their own distinct features and associated practices. When we come to look at the assignments, in contrast to the conferences, the assignments tend to embed a very traditional academic 'essay' genre. Exit 1 H802, assessment tasks are presented in familiar ways. Despite the fact that students are encouraged to include references to conference messages in their written work, the assignment questions are still prescribed by a traditional essay genre.

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

likely to mean a very different form of assessment altogether - for example, students keeping their own reflective logs (see Cunne, Chapter 11).

• Recognising the institutional relationships of power and authority that exist between students and tutors and acknowledging that these are embed-
ed in, among other things, present assessment practices. Becoming a 'facilitator' rather than a 'tutor' does little to alter this.

Exploring some of the more obvious social features of student contribu-
tions to different sites in this way might, hopefully, give us some clues as to why students find it difficult to make connections between writing in the conferences and writing for assessment. On the surface there are not the obvious connections for students to make between these two forms of the kind there are, for example, between traditional print-based materials and as-
sembled written work. In each circumstance, students often report looking to the peer text to give them clues about how to approach their own writing (Lea 1998). In contrast, in the conferences there are few of the familiar marks of authority that students are looking for - for example, the referenced author or given validity to the text. This may, in part, account for why students on the conference course are looking for the authority of the tutor contributions. It appears that although the conferencierRecent is not 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 learn-
ing tool if 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 our-
ourselves what we are assessing. It may not be enough to encourage students to engage with the academic content of the conferences; we need to focus more specifically on developing students' literacy in terms of their own learning, which must include a reflective approach to academic content. There will, of course, be cases such as H802 where it is more difficult to make a distinction between content and the process of reflectivity. In courses such as this one, therefore, it makes sense to enter into discussions about what constitutes academic content. In others, such as A23, where the academic content is more clearly delineated, we need to explore further the ways in which features of

Discuss the following quotation from Ivor Blish (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 behave or compel the students to find the time or the will to learn that we can provide the learner with new links to the world instead of funnelling all educational programs through the teacher... 'Network' is often used, unnecessarily, to designate the channels reared for materials selected by others... I wish I had another word... a term for 'educational web'.

Students reported that there was an artificiality about seeing 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 their being to attempt to merge one into another. Since the more familiar way of approaching such a question would be to refer-
ence 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 achieve the correspondence that students need to make in making ade-
quate use of conferencing in their learning and ultimately in their writing for assessment, maybe in 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 which is embedded in the learning environment. What disciplinary and subject matter being is explored in the conference? What assumptions are tutors making about teaching and learning the course?

• Understanding the nature of the contributions that students make to the conferences and how these embed particular commitments to and understandings of academic knowledge. As tutors, recognising the im-
portance of those 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 content.

• Deciding in what ways and in what form the conference is or attempts to replicate or substitute for. We need to explore new ways in which they can make connections between the conferences and their assessed work. This may mean more than asking students to evidence cor-
ference contributions into written assessment. It is more
Making Dancing, Making Essays: Academic Writing in the Study of Dance
Sally Mitchell, Victoria Marks/Fisher, Lynne Hale and Judith Harding

This chapter is concerned with the practice of writing in a discipline where the primary activity apparently has nothing to do with writing—the activity of dance. Dancers are physical. Many would say that they think with their bodies. But now there are also words and crafts people claim that they 'let their hands do the thinking.' They invest through the experience of moving in space, through their movement itself, in that space, to ideas, to music, and to other dancers within that space; the documentation of those intentions records their experience. While dance students in a university setting are confident about their own practice, with its startling point of physical movement (and its multiple affinities of spatial awareness, sensitivity in physical relationships, concentration, teamwork and an experimental 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 that 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 'skills' module for first-year dance students. The module covered writing within certain written forms, such as the essay or research report. As well as exploring the technicalities of argumentation, the project has sought to understand some of the social, institutional, pedagogical and anthropological factors which influence staff expectations and student performance.

The study in the School of Dance harked to the kinds of writing that students were required to produce, the articulations 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 distinction 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 on the course we offer a socially oriented explanation for the choreography and writing tasks, which draws on Harré'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 essay text suggests, however, that the writing does more than comment on the making of a dance, in fact it creates meaning which is both unique and part of a discourse (Gee 1995). This enables us to draw an analogy between writing and choreography—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 in an academic context with some of the weight of choreography, it was not unusual to regard the essay as a distraction, an almost alien, to the intense creative and practical work the undergraduate undertaking. In critical studies, however, where students learn how to analyse dance as viewers, the essay seemed to 'be the task in a relatively unproblematic way. In this chapter we concentrate on the writing required for the choreography course.

Second-year per cent of the assessment for the choreography course was accounted for, not surprisingly, by the choreography 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 taped recording of the dance in progress then formed the basis of a more detailed discussion between the tutor and choreographer. Formally the piece was performed to an audience of fellow students and staff and subject to a final assessment.

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

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

You can see the immediacy of the chapter that the distinction between choreography and writing is as much to do with perceptions of the differences as with an actual radical distinction between the two. There is, for example, a certain irony in the way the student is given a written form and structural advice for writing when she is helping students to make a dance, it is a previously structure of style and structure that she brings to their attention. Whereas the choreographer is concerned in a process of realizing and transforming ideas through the medium of dance, the preference for writing is as a kind of commentary, giving (reporting) an idea of 'how they felt' and 'how they wanted the piece to be', rather than 'about the person, because it's the person that's creative.' The writing advice that the tutor is able to give is not of course equivalent to that which she gives in choreography. She is an expert, a practitioner as well as a teacher in academic writing; she is a novice relying on a basic, perhaps superficially understood, shorthand: 'don't use 'I', have a good introduction, conclusion...'

These results only go so far in helping students understanding what making an essay involves, other more elusive requirements govern success. The essay titles students were asked to respond to in choreography provided clues as to what form these tasks would take in the way that the dance was 'original', which means it has to be uniquely hers, not a copy, but also be acceptable, part of the collective 'way of doing' that creates 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 'originality' in a particular form of academic writing (Kanter and Gärden 1989), but it is also to a way of explaining what goes on in the making of a dance. Both activities can be channeled through the notion of a 'personal identity project' (Harré 1985; see also Ron et al. 1993; Mitchell 1995, 1996). The project can be depicted schematically as two axes - the public/private and the individual/collective - which when they intersect create four quadrants. In personal identity formation the quadrants are traversed from the public/collective to a dichotomous direction by four types of operation: appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalization (see Figure 3.1).

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, Liza, described how her increasing knowledge of dance and choreographers liberates her to make dance:

It makes you braver, I suppose...to be just you, which is a difficult thing to do. Wouldn't it be easy, wouldn't it just be yourself. But it's not.

Liza 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 is a sturdy way, of course, uniquely hers, a transformation of everything she had appropriated.

When it is performed in front of an audience, the dance work is published - this is when it really gets recognized. The dancers get a certain number of criteria (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
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Exploring correspondences between writing and choreographing

‘A dance skills’ module developed for first-year students in the School engaged 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 prioritisation’. It was based on a conjecture that the confidence the students experienced in their personal and creative practice as dancers and choreographers could help tackle the inane 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 to underpin both activities.

The module involved students in exercises that focused on organisation and selection – 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 separated in terms of coverage and elaboration – sleeveless, short sleeves, long sleeves, with long sleeves and collars – elements that did not fit in the overall sequence of colour ‘paragraphs’ had to be catered for. The resulting desire to make a clear and logical classification between ‘paragraphs’, multi-coloured piles incorporating all the colour ideas were ‘conclusions’. This process became, ultimately, more than just playing 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 saw as necessary to formal public, explicit verbal form, its nessiness, or, in Laban’s terms, its potential for conventionalization into the public/collective realm.

An extract from an essay by another student, Elle, makes an good example of how nesiness can be claimed through the writing. Her dance is entitled How Come the Sun.

This piece [Alley’s To Be or Not To Be] is similar in structure to the second section of How Come the Sun. Alley’s dancers begin the piece by encasing gradually on each side with their arms in the air rather than on those around them. As more enter, the stage fills and the atmosphere picks up into a lively, mildly moving a re of dancers danc- ing 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 that both the audience and the dancers must experience through the piece. By using a strong element of naturalism, both in the general structure 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 the audience was being put into it. Though most of the time the user, possibly the most common emotion, is the same as way in which Peau Roussus uses reality in her work. In 1986, for example, she has one dancer running, circling the stage 36 or 40 times, shouting the words ‘I’m tired’. The dancer does not have to feel any fatigue to the audience, because the genuineness 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.

Elle puts her piece into dialogue with the other pieces she has chosen. She shows, for example, how Alley’s work is both ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ her own. She abstracts from details of the work to a style of ‘the principal action, the principal action, a dream of the idea’ (Kaiser and Goeider 1989, 290). As a result of the experience, to, and distinction of form, some established knowledge, characteristics, Kaiser noted that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalized mode) and transparency (explication of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing, what Olson (1977) refers to as the ‘common technique’. Kaiser and Goeider (1986, 291) comment that in Western academic context a sense of exploration must be constrained through a sense of writing. Such a writing system makes a claim on behalf of the exploration system (which in this case is the choreography). It

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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 conventionalization processes are only partly 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 survival of something that is seen in connection, a philosophical idea, a dance, where ‘nessness’ is understood, as Hare’s model suggests, not as to ‘the very core of the idea’ (Kaiser and Goeider 1989, 290) but as deriving from orientation to, and distinctiveness from, some established knowledge, characteristics, Kaiser noted that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalized mode) and transparency (explication of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing, what Olson (1977) refers to as the ‘common technique’. Kaiser and Goeider (1986, 291) comment that in Western academic context a sense of exploration must be constrained through a sense of writing. Such a writing system makes a claim on behalf of the exploration system (which in this case is the choreography). It
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I felt that that was a waste of time because there was no idea, no ground at that time of you needed these skills. Actually, having it there can mean when you had essay questions that you needed to work on... would actually have helped a lot. Even now, when we have to develop an argument... I have a 10/00 word discussion idea and I am really struggling with it.

What we know of the difficulties experienced by students writing for the choreography course bears out this comment: help was needed not 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 essays 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 related to, who can see but not think.

Although a number of students felt lifted by the opportunity to discover their formal writing with learners from the theatre (dance), others wanted any writing support to come from inners within their own disciplinary communities. They claimed 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 analogous dance writing.

Despite this, however, we want to persist in claiming some value in exploring the correspondences between the two activities. For many students, overcoming resistance to the idea of writing is the biggest hurdle. This is also very recognized by the tutor on the critical studies course who devotes at least a few seminars to detailed, rather technical, discussions 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 most of the session (discussion of videos of dance performances). . . . They see it as a different kind of activity which is somehow distanced from them.

They somehow put it on a different kind of hat, if you like, and engage in something which is alien. And it's very difficult for some to draw the line between helping them with their work, focusing on it, as you know...

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engage in discussion about why they are being asked to write and how this would involve on the part of staff a preparedness to be theoretical and, possibly, political in that 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.

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 a tutor from other disciplines brings, 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 choreographing. It should also involve reflection upon the educationally personal and epistemological purposes of writing (see Lea and Street, Chapter 2), and the different modes - for example, argument - that students might, directly or indirectly, be asked to employ.

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to the staff and students of the School of Dance. All student names have been changed. Thanks too, to the LeedsBeckett Trust for being the funding project 'Improving the Quality of Argument in Higher Education: based at Midlands University during 1990 - 1991. This project was based on a project 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 LeedsBeckett Trust and based at Midlands University during 1990 - 1991. (see Mitchell, 1994).

2. It is this link that makes the timing of the essay important. In our study we found that, depending on when their performances were scheduled, some students were required to hand in their essays before their dances had reached completion. Harshly expressed the influence of this situation when she commented that before the dance is finished 'you haven't got much to go on apart from what you saw April can be'.

3. This has similarities with that proposed by Heath (1993) in her analysis of the approach that children who have been told bedtime stories seem to use (explain, break down into small facts, use anecdotes, features and resources is nowhere absent). These approaches, she claims, lead to easy allegation of linear literary - ask questions, take notes, discuss various points of view, write descriptive prose, review and feed back.

6

The ‘Personal’ in University Writing: Uses of Reflective Learning Journals

Phyllis Crome

Is there a place and space for the expression of the ‘personal’ and, if so, is it relevant in higher education? Higher education is a complex and multidisciplinary enterprise, characterized by 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 use of their personal position was thrown up by our work in an action research project on the uses of 'new forms of student writing' that were introduced alongside traditional essays in courses taught by social anthropology faculty at Sussex University. The research was funded by a U.K. Higher Education Funding Council 'Teaching and Learning Development' project administered by the National Network for Teaching and Learning Anthropology in 1997-98. The study was designed to look at the impact on student learning of the new forms of writing, all of which may be described 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 was included in the project in its original form, it 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 contexts of the pedagogical and institutional setting in which it was produced. From the start, therefore, I was looking at the purposes and rationale for the introduction of the journals and how they were being used and evaluated. I was also interested in the epistemological assumptions about their courses, and their attitudes to the journals. I attended seminars and workshops, and had many informal conversations, with tutors and students, both individually and in groups, on their experiences and views of anthropology, of their courses, and of different forms of writing.

Benefits of the use of learning journals

The research indicated that writing learning journals had the potential significantly to enhance and develop the depth and range of student learning, in different ways according to their purpose within their respective courses. However, the extent to which this potential was realised 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 generalisations drawn from the data which I believe are relevant for tutor practice.

First, journals gave students an opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing fluency. It is a practice that developed the habit of writing and made the students more confident writers. Journals also helped students to reflect on their learning and to develop their critical thinking skills. They also provided a platform for students to express their thoughts and ideas, and to receive feedback from their tutors.

The discipline: the 'personal' and 'reflexivity'

The introduction of the new forms of writing was related to a continued discipline-based debate about the status of the researcher and of writing within anthropology (for example, see Clifford and Marcus 1986). The contested notion of the 'personal' in both anthropology research and education was therefore a continuing model running through the study. It came up in different guises in different places - for example, in tutors' discussions around anthropology as a discipline, and in discussions about the new forms of writing which offered students different and sometimes contradictory messages about what it means to use the personal might mean. It emerged as an issue particularly acutely in relation to another highly contested text, 'reflexivity'. Conventional, as a part of the research project, the subject group organized a staff development workshop on reflexivity, which was debated with respect to both anthropology and to teaching and learning. The discussion was later summarized in a report which compares 'reflective' and 'reflection' and then applies both concepts to students' learning of anthropology.

Anthropologists have always been 'reflective' in two related senses. First, they have concerned themselves with recognizing how knowledge about the world is socioculturally situated. This is in and must be a form of principle for a discipline concerned with the relativity of different knowledge systems. Secondly, they have concerned themselves with relating themselves in relation to knowledge and its production. What appears to have happened in recent years is a foregrounding of these processes in anthropological writing combining an intensification of self criticism/self awareness with the making explicit of the political nature of knowledge production. Thus later development, which can be related to the project of modernity, has led to debates about the status of the 'personal' in the production of anthropological knowledge.
The Record of Study

The political anthropology course handouts introduced 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, and 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 in its image of the students' personal understanding of the concepts presented in the course — concepts that themselves changed and were considered over time, in accordance with changing theoretical positions. The students' thinking in introducing the Record of Study to the course was more clearly in an interview I had with the course convener.

We wanted students to start their records of study with a statement about what they expected of the course, and what their first understanding were 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 confidence in their own learning and also provide a vehicle for reflecting and connecting similar arguments found in different contexts and seeing that there was some cumulative aspect to their learning. Finally, we wanted them to be reflective in another sense, in that they could incorporate evidence from their own personal experience into the record of study showing that their understanding had evolved through engagement 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 opinion-maker, trying to grasp new ideas, and as a "reader" who thinks about her own position with respect to the course material. In this context the personal is to do with the students' intellectual dance and their social/political identity. The aim of the journal was to enable them to bring this identity into a relation with the course material. The fact that some students had a more clearly defined sense of this identity than others had an impact on how seriously 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:

The Personal's in University Writing

We had great difficulty in defining what a society was and weren't sure, for example, whether writers were part of our society or whether they had their own. This is where the now 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 marks on the whole have been very difficult. So I suppose having to write a 1,000 word piece on a petty side subject forced me to either relevant information, group similar and opposing concepts and avoid waffling off.

The writer 'taking through' his thinking about the ideas presented in the course, which are interpreted with commentaries 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 'bigger' one.

The aims and assumptions of this core anthropology course, as expressed both in the course content and in the subjects' understanding of the subject, remain somewhat above, and particularly in his image of the bubble theory, the same constant theme of the subject's core anthropology course, which is recorded in terms of studying and learning in the passage about the writer's 'perspective on biculturalism'. The course also demonstrates a confident authorial self — the writer's sense of authority — which is expressed, for example, in the slightly playful use of language in his own framing of the subject's core anthropology course, and through the use of the different kind of writing, construct a kind new discursive self. He is writing differently in a way that is based on his reactions to the world 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 Studies, 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 aspects or problems...
- The course aims to introduce students to a range of themes central to the School...
- It seeks to understand the individual student's place in society through modes of imagination and comprehension of the social sciences, literature and the arts.

Therubric for the Death Journal unit:

- The purpose of the journal is to provide a space where students can:
  - record and reflect on explorations and explanations of death...
  - in various forms of the popular media...literature...artistic work (a 'scribblebook' format was suggested).
  - consider contemporary issues surrounding death and their own thoughts on these.
  - 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, content, and role will vary a great deal depending on the student, and I hope that students will make it their own.

The use of the first person here may be a signal of the writer/teacher's approach. She referred a number of times in the seminars to her belief in the need for a writer (in this case a researching anthropologist) to acknowledge her own subjectivity and her own presence in a research project. At the same time, her language 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 central things I'm trying to get them to do is to challenge, deconstruct, de-stabilise...to challenge common-sense views about there being a single right way to do things and getting them to realise 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 existence of the journal as a form in the new millennium framework, that she would not have introduced herself, and that would not have appeared in any anthropological course.

The relatively free-flowing structure of the seminars was reflected in and consistent with the requirements of the journals, which also offered an opportunity to make choices about content and to make connections between the text 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 eroded 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 'academic' kind of understanding, but in their own right, to be articulated, refined and developed in ways that the writer herself decided.

The following indicates the impact of the death journals on the students' writing and understanding:

- 'Friends' and relatives' deaths.
- 'Will I continue?'
- 'My longings for death.'

being included in the death journal coursework. Parity it was an evocation of the Romantic view of an authentic, individual self that persisted even in this course concerned with the social construction of selves. As Graham (1991) points out, a sense of the 'personal' as an 'authentic' individual voice was strongly present in work on writing in education in the UK in the 1970s (for example, Britton 1978). Graham associates this with the idea, now in retreat, of an authentic, unique and unified self writing to be rekindled and expressed, usually through imaginative writing. This was a view of thinking about writing in education influencing generations of English teachers in the UK and particularly in the 1970s.

The notion of the authentic single voice has tended to have been replaced by, in the words of the 'subject' in post-structuralist literary theory, or by the notion of multiple identities, in the way that both perspectives would be seen of point of view, an act of writing, which can never escape the assumption of a discursive self (in Foucault's terms), an interpretative construct and it necessarily, every language act also positions the writer. As Ulrich (1991: 125) puts it, even the most personal meanings, those 'I' seems to use the most authentically, are discursively articulated, interpretations through which tradition speaks and the 'I' is spoken of. This view of language and identity also fits in with the notion of writing as a social practice that informs the construction of any identity. Indeed, it fits with some of the student experience of writing the journals. Nevertheless, as Ulrich points out, the possibility of, and the need for, 'authenticity' in writing is strongly felt by student writers, whatever in source might be.

The death journal was not strongly presented as terms of an individual voice but just the journal and the death course itself had marks of that approach, as we have explored. Nonetheless, the fact that the tutor was an anthropologist and that the students on the course readily spoke of differences in their different writing 'I's, the impression of 'writing for myself' in the journals contrasted for many with the need to adapt to academic norms of writing. That sense of 'writing for myself' might be variously interpreted - for example, in terms of a sense of an 'essential' self, or of terms of identities that felt more 'real' to the students, perhaps framed as more long-standing and entrenched, than the 'academic' self that they were in the process of constructing. As the students expressed it frequently in discussions about their journal writing, 'I could put my own opinions down', 'I felt I mattered'. With regard to the journals, the students took their assumption of being able to 'be myself' to mean that they could write as they liked in a way that felt emotionally satisfying and liberating. This did not necessarily mean that the writing was 'easy' and in practice it was hedged around with these different views of their writing. In some cases, writing a journal posed as many difficulties as any kind of writing might, and indeed sought guidelines on 'what to write', which they had to consider in relation to their readers and the course setting. The work therefore sometimes a tension between their sense of operating as an 'individual' and the demands of a particular writing task. All the same, the
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. In spite of this, 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 studies in higher education. The records of study and the death journals were different from each other because their contexts 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 the university writing ways of knowing that are usually absent from it, and opened up a different kind of space for their engagement with the course. By inviting students’ “autobiographical selves” to appear centrally on the academic stage, the journals offered a way of fostering the development of a confident authorial self that claims the right to write as a university student. By asking students to write differently, the journals allowed them to think differently. In this way the new forms of writing have a potential not only for enhancing student learning but also for expanding tutor and student perceptions of the boundaries of higher education. There are many courses for which learning journals would be useful. However, the different uses of the idea of the personal in the two courses I have looked at demonstrate how the introduction of learning journals needs to be thought through as carefully as any other curriculum innovation within any particular course. Among the issues to be considered are the following:

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

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

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A brief retrospective

Before the introduction of formal partnerships between schools and universities for the purpose of teacher education, PGCE students were offered few written guidelines concerning the assignments they had to produce for assessments 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 considerable 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 possess those dispositions which administrative policy presupposed for teacher-trainees to the degree that they inhabited the curriculum. This perception of students as active and autonomous constructors of knowledge is closely tied with a view of writing which reaches back to the Romantic period and emphasizes 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 graded high were usually strongly interpretive in their orientation. To be more specific, the students tended to follow the same basic pattern in which the characteristics of theory were transposed into a form of concrete data such as vignettes from classrooms, or transcripts of recorded talk, or excerpts from policy documents. Consequently, though the assignments were referred to as "enquiries," the most successful tended to be more like essays in which the students used theory in order to develop an individual, dialogical and personally relevant perspective on some aspect of educational practice.

It was, furthermore, a perspective which avoided simplistic conformity instead it showed an awareness of complexity and an attention from easy answers. The examiners' comments on the highly rated assignments added another dimension to this emphasis on individual and personally relevant meaning-making. The assignments were treated as if they were mirrors 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' "stirring" and "interesting," and to their being "sensitive and knowledgeable," "imaginative" and "insightful."

There were some references to traditional academic criteria such as "this is a cogent argument," "there is evidence of wide reading." Such criteria were, however, unusually shaped into personal qualities -- for example,

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

The conclusion of the 'real world' is remit in forms which derive at least some of their creative power from that despondent cultural myth of the 'busy teacher' in which reflection is held to be a nebulous and inadequate substitute for the concrete immediacy of action.

In the UK, there has been little research on the teacher's identity for some time. As early as 1985, for example, Dr. Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, referred to 'jack-of-all-trades' theorizing (Joseph 1985). Such attacks became more prevalent in the early 1990s, culminating in the statutory requirement that schools play a greater role in the training of teachers. Thus it is schools that are now linked to training institutions in formal partnerships arranged whereby student teachers spend two-thirds of their time in the partnership schools. The partnerships vary considerably in their day-to-day detail and especially with regard to the components of the PGCE course to which teachers in schools make their greatest contribution.

However, even within this new context, the preferred mode of training continues to be reflection on practice (Wilson 1996: 174). Like most teacher trainers, Carson (1995: 151) defends this focus against its critics: 'Reflective practice does amount to a form of their philosophical position that is necessary for teaching in these uncertain and changing times.' A consequence of this view is that the individual students are encouraged to think of themselves as 'reflective practitioners.' This image, which seems to confer a definite identity, is, however, highly problematic. In its most entrenched form, it becomes an identity that, as Carson (1995: 151) himself has commented, it tends to be no more than an empty (right):

The phrase 'reflection practice' has been abroad in the land. So much so that student teachers will roll their eyes at the very mention of the 'R-word.' Sure, it is a term that has been overused in teacher education and students are right to object in its endless and often empty repitition.

This comment matches my own observations as a novice. Consequently, in this chapter I attempt to put back into 'reflective practitioner' some of the complexity which is too often emptied out -- a complexity which carries important pedagogical 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 development and what needs to be clarified is that I shall shortly indicate, this entails questions of identity and subjectivity.

Innovations have, however, led to new conceptions of the kind of body of agency, and so of agent, which the PGCE course should foster. In order to lead those new conceptions viability 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 base 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 particularly graphic illustration of the extent to which an assignment could become idealized with the individual who write it is provided by the following examiner's comments:

This is clearly an enthusiastic and hardworking student with considerable 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 offered by an individual student's assignment and those the student might be led to demonstrate in the classroom. Such an explanation does not take into account what might need to be questioned, since it would reinforce certain assumptions concerning the student's subjectivity -- assumptions which can be better understood through the lens of a "situational autonomy", a concept introduced by Bourdieu (1990) as a critical account of competence. Such a concept emphasizes the significance of context and its influence on agency. The student's writing is not an expression of inner capacity implicitly regarded as the source of a teacher's agency in the classroom. The meaning of this manifestation of agency helps in turn to bring into being, and so to shape, an expression which, in turn, is shaped by the students' writing. The concept of competence is thus used to demonstrate the extent to which the student's writing is influenced by their participation in the education component.
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 classrooms and schools the kind of close interpretative reading with which they were already familiar.

The recognizability of the statements assignment advantaged some students while disadvantaging others was one factor that led to the development of new, more detailed guidelines. However, as I shall indicate below, the introduction of the summative requirement that trainer teachers spend two-thirds of their time in schools was a move 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 confidence in UK undemocratic 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 (1996) theories once again helps me to crystallize this change of forms ‘performance’, a term which subsumes ‘specialised output’ and the ‘explicit rules for replaying them’ has replaced ‘compliance’. E.g. to put it another way, by drawing on the current government-owned language of teacher training ‘competences’ has been used to ‘comprehensive insecure’[s]. However, in the institution in which I work the greater involvement of the teaching community was viewed as a welcome opportunity to develop an improved PGCE course in which theory and practice could be more closely integrated. To emphasize the value of the extensive participation of trainees in the life of schools, ‘student teachers’ were renamed ‘beginning teachers’. For similar reasons the ‘education component’ is now the ‘professional studies’ programme. This programme is currently based on the recognition that a teacher is engaged in a wide variety of educational aims and objectives beyond those administered within curricular areas. Learners and teachers thus cover cross-curricular topics such as the history of the education system, the role of the school in the community, pupil learning and different learning styles. In accordance with the aim of partnership between schools and the higher education training institution, beginning teachers are at present required to carry out a ‘school-focused enquiry’ as well as a ‘research and development project’ under the supervision of teachers in their placement schools; these enquiries being partly intended as a contribution to the school on the part of the beginning teacher. The question or problems to be addressed are decided in discussion with the teacher, but the assessment criteria are provided by the training institution. These criteria are designed to indicate the ‘quality of the beginning postgraduate teacher training, an aim which I shall comment on later. Students have to relay 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

A framework for analysing students’ written texts

I have my analysis on the four unnever background of the Ruricam (1987) identified as studying written academic discourse. These contexts are the

beginning teacher A’s assignment

The ‘object under study’ seems clear at first glance. The writer tells us in her brief abstract that the assignment looks at some of the theories in the areas of language and learning, language acquisition and bilingualism in the mainstream, and their current status. However, in the final paragraphs she indicates that her primary concern is not with theory as such but rather with theory in its capacity to serve practice. Practice comes more sharply into focus in the next sentence of the abstract: beginning teacher A states that ‘she also looks at the ways in which her teaching practice is informed by her experiences in mainstream and bilingual classrooms and to the school’s policy statement and recommendations for good practice’. The assignment is an account of practice in mainstream, in the sentence that follows, A tells her readers that she is in search of ‘models of good pedagogy’ which can inform her future teaching. This blend of autobiography recurrently draws theory and practice into an alliance within a subsampling and personally pertinent object of study – the nature and sources of the teacher’s agency in the classroom. As will emerge later, agency (and to also identity) here turns on a clash of discourses in which the meanings and values which A finds in her reading compare with those which she encounters in the world of the school.

At this point a return to Bammoss’ paper is worthwhile to highlight the problematic and demanding nature of the beginning teacher B’s task as an assignment writer. Bammoss’ academic eschews the explicit guidelines which they defined in relation to procedures and knowledge in their well-established fields. The beginning teacher, on the other hand, has to create the object of study within the demands and expectations of the higher education institution and the school. The implications of this dual situation are more clearly traceable within A’s assignment when her use of the literature of the field is brought into focus. It is clear that she finds her own perspective – a personal notion which matches Bernstein’s description of ‘competence’ – this is evident in the assignment’s first two concise summaries of the empirical information-making which is to be found in, for example, Barrow et al. (1990) and Leake (1990) – an emphasis which offers a view of knowledge as constructed by active learners.

The assignment outlines in good detail the subjective and the pedagogic corollary of this view of knowledge and its implications for the pedagogy of the teachers in the classroom – teachers can promote learning by
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 surfacing. However, what it serves to conceal is the actual nature of A’s problem. While she is not unique in being experienced, I would suggest that her difficulties currently derive from coping with 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, in view of her emphasis her identity might be said to be that of a disciple); on the other hand, she is also a practising teacher encountering performance-oriented expectations such as ‘transferable skills’ and hence, issues within the school system which are constructed in the descriptions of actual lessons which she includes in her assignment.

At this point I need to emphasize that I do not see the problem as a case of stagnation in the student. The assignment is thoughtful and perceptive, and the feedback values what the student has achieved. Thus, whereas in the early 1950s the PGCE students high grades developed a psychological perspective and were focused on the students’ perceptions of the teaching, the high achievers among the beginning teachers now seem to demonstrate an understandable desire to plunder a narrow range of theory in a search for solutions to similar problems. However, as I shall argue later, there is a way forward which would not imply going back to the past.

Beginning teacher B’s assignment

Beginning teacher B experienced the same dual discomforts as beginning teacher A, but handled it differently in her assignment. Whereas A is primarily concerned with the application of the model and the development of self-confidence in her writing, B concentrates on practice. In fact, she implicitly, and almost immediately, presents practice as more ‘real’ than theory. Throughout her paper, the ‘object under study’ is initially ‘differentiation targeting different abilities’, the meaning of that concept is dealt with briefly — a definition shows from Capel (1985) soon getting it out of the way.

Differentiation targeting different abilities is about ‘raising the standards of all pupils in a school not just those underachieving. It can be conceived of as within a whole school policy — [and] is a planned process of intervention in the classroom learning of the pupil. It takes into account prior learning and the characteristics of the individual.’

Having disposed of problems of definition, B turns to her primary object of study — ‘differentiation’, not as a concept but as a practice. Keeping within that focus, 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: ‘the difference’ — the differences. Following the patent of her process provided in the assignment guidelines, she then frames a question:

To what extent can differentiation targeting ability and learning style be employed without significant disruption of the teaching styles that had been previously adopted?

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

The emphasis on practice also influences her choice 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, trying to establish how sources of 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, ‘Gardner proposes’, ‘a (support teacher) believes’, ‘Topping claims’, according to Reid et al. However, in referring to her own research, she draws on a positivist paradigm, attributing the status of the real and certain to her results and conclusions. She ‘discovers’, she ‘produces’; ‘reflections’. She seems to be returning to Gardener’s theory of multiple intelligences with enthusiasm, and declares that she will not abandon her interest in the theory even though it has been strongly criticized. She is, however, no disciple; she states that she will use Gardner’s theory to the test in the future, using a larger, more carefully selected sample of students. She thus indicates that she is more uncertain of the epistemological view of such an enterprise.

The problem with which B, who was invited primarily for herself, B had been given in her assignment to write about her classroom experience which she wished to share. She was asked to comment on her classroom experience, which was the only part of the assignment which she had written, and to consider the implications of that experience. She was also asked to consider the implications of that experience for the classroom experience of other teachers.

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, it will be difficult to continue with the discussion which rests on my selective borrowing and recomposition of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’. It is far too idiosyncratically focused on the ‘object under study’ which emerges from B’s assignment primarily that of an apparent researcher. However, the day-to-day business and concerns of beginning teachers do not allow for a place for research in the detailed planning and discussion of a proposed project. Beginning teacher B has thus finally to conclude that her procedures were inadequate and that some of her findings have any significance. Parasitically, it is in her detailed account of the limitations of her investigation that the merit of her assignment lies.

The general significance of the above analyses of the two assignments can be summarized in the following way: each assignment brings to the fore points in the tensions and problems associated with the current state of the PGCE course in both the school and the university. However, whereas beginning teacher A does not perceive the conflict between ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ (Bembenek 1986) in the teacher’s agency, B identifies agency in the classroom with an exclusive, performance-oriented emphasis on what is transferable within a positivist paradigm.
8
A Question of Attribution: 
The Indeterminacy of ‘Learning from 
Experience’
Simon Purdie

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

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

What is fascinating 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, not 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 ‘lacking’, 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 unfamiliar 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 Stauskis (1977) the students’ unsuccessful text potentially have a ‘rational’ or ‘logical’. We need to understand this if we want to know what further guidance students may need. And in doing so, we may find that we abandon the common view of any teaching of writing as somehow ‘remedial’ or ‘teaching only what students should have learned before’ (Hull and Rose 1989; Swales 1990; Hull 1997).1

What I find particularly striking from being a participant observer in a course, and from talking to students about their writing, is how difficult it is, for the novice or novice, to work out what is required in a new context. A task or instruction may seem very clear when you are already very familiar with what is being learned, or are simply a passive observer. But the same task may be very unclear and very ambiguous to the student who is trying to use it to guide their actions and writing.

Equally, I am struck by just how difficult it is for tutors to make explicit what is required. Firstly, what is required seems so familiar and obvious to the tutor. Indeed, most of our own learning has been ‘on the job’, and may have remained very implicit. Second, there is virtually no recipe to writing, say, an ‘essay’ or a ‘financial audit’. For good reasons such texts are not all the same. Thirdly, even when we become aware of the students’ need for more detailed guidance, we can feel that we are walking a tightrope between giving this guidance, and feeling we are ‘spoiling’ the students. In most courses, there is a belief that part of the challenge is that students should work out what is required. Within vocational courses in particular, part of the instruction is that students learn how to work out what is required within a particular professional scenario.

In this chapter I focus on a potentially major source of misunderstanding between tutor and student, that can lead to students’ writing texts considered unsuccessful by the tutor. I call this the ‘question of attribution’. It arises when students are involved in ‘learning from experience’. More generally, it arises when students are attempting to develop some general understanding from a particular case.

My argument is that learning from an experience in any context involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as generally significant, and what should be regarded as more particular. We cannot assume that the significance of an experience is self-evident. For example, within vocational education, where an activity or experience is inevitably linked to both the educational and the professional contexts, the process of learning from an experience 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. The implication is that 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.

The examples I will offer to illustrate this are taken from a vocational MSc course in environmental science: the students were learning to carry out and to write on an ‘environmental impact assessment’ (EIA). But first I want to argue that the ‘question of attribution’ is an important issue in any context of ‘learning from experience’, both within and beyond education.

A question of attribution
Within traditional academic education

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

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

Similar questions also arise within other disciplines, and particularly when students are studying in several disciplines at once. For example, sociology, philosophy, English and linguistics ask very different views about what ‘counts’ as evidence and argument. Students who manage to work out what ‘counts’ in one course may attribute this to the particular course or to...
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’. This is observed in science education by ‘discovery’. 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/s² (as it is recognized 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 apparatus in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity!

The point is that this discovery, and the basis for it, may never be explicitly discussed. Through recording teacher-student and student-student conversations in science classrooms, Leach and Classen (1987) and others have rephrased in the difficult position of believing students should ‘discover’ for themselves, but also wanting them to know the ‘right answer’. They have teachers attributing significance and inaccuracy to their students’ different measurements, guided by their own observation of what the result should be. They have students acquiring with judgments made by the teacher, and accepting or rejecting measurements and hypotheses, on no basis that is ever explained to them’ (Leach and Classen 1987: 124). The implication is that students learn to attribute significance and inaccuracy to their measurements, often at the same time, to produce what is expected. (Ironically, in doing so they are experiencing the intended practices of the science of perceiving and locating objects so as to produce empirical findings that are accountable to their evidence.)

A Question of Attribution

Within science research

Beyond education, attribution is also required of scientists themselves. One of the key observations in sociological studies of the construction of scientific knowledge is of 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 atoms, cells or organisms, they are experimenting 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 and professional decisions from particular experiences. Yet aspects of these particular experiences may not illustrate professional practice, or may not illustrate professional practices. They may equally represent practices that are particular to a small group or institution, or particular to a small case in a single context. Moreover, rather than representing the aims of the profession, they may represent the learning of professional practice to certain constraints of time and resources. I show this in Figure 8.3.

Without guidance, understanding the significance of their experiences, the learner may attribute an experience in ways that are quite different 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 ‘honest’ or ‘skilled’.)

Figure 8.3 Attributing the significance of an experience within vocational education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution within vocational education</th>
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<td>What is interesting about vocational or professional oriented education is that it seems to bring together all the questions of attribution that I have described in these other contexts. The difficulty for the student, and the potential for misunderstanding and ‘unsuccessful’ writing, are even greater. Typically, vocationally oriented courses aim to engage students actively in the kinds of professional practices that they need to know and understand in a future career. The familiar teaching process aims to echo the process of learning on the job, to create a situation in which students are learning by doing and ‘learning from experience’. In particular, such courses engage students in actually producing the kinds of professional documents (such as reports, audits, letters) that they will produce in the workplace. In some cases this is explicitly called ‘simulation’. In others it is not. Students may simply be asked to carry out, and to write, a financial audit or an environmental impact assessment (EIA), as if they were in a professional context. On the one hand, this ‘learning from experience’ demands the same process of attribution and description for those learning ‘on the job’, with the same potential problems and implications. Students are involved in learning aspects of general professional practice from the experience of particular examples. They have to infer what, say, financial audits or environmental assessments are like in general (that is, the genre) from the particular texts they may have read and written. Aspects of the experience may illustrate general and repeatable practices, or they may require merely one set of practices among many. This is the rationale for the particular scenarios and professional constraints. Students’ attribution of the experience is central to their developing understanding of the profession.</td>
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activity or experience to the wider profession, they will see it as of significant and lasting benefit. Seeing it as significant and irrelevant is ‘real’ professional practice. They will also see it as not worthy of inclusion in their professional texts. This attribution is therefore central to the students’ developing understanding and learning, and to their writing.

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

Even within the lectures, talk and handouts of the tutor, there are often claims that the activity is ‘real’ or ‘educational’, and that the students will be writing, say, ‘a proper report’, as they would do in a professional context. It is common to hear students talking to each other in these terms. They may merge a course with an activity unrelated to the kind of professional activity in which they might engage in a future career. They may even be quite dismissive of an activity as ‘not real’, and see those 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 devaluing educational activities and experience. On the one hand, it is a part of a view of education in which relevance is seen narrowly in terms of preparing students for employment. On the other hand, it is part of the formal 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 MA course in environmental science. The research was carried out in collaboration with the tutor, who was interested in the way that previous students on the course had frequently discounted: the way he described the insight gained from this kind of professional practice activity. The study was designed to include tutors and students in the two courses, to identify the insights and difficulties in learning and teaching professional writing that arise even within ‘good practice’; even when the tutor is interested in writing; recognizing the kinds of demands he is making on the students, and already offers students additional support.

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assumptions, the understandings and the ways of talking about science and texts that they drew on in their discussions, which when combined seemed to point to unequal directions. I was interested in the origins of these, within their previous education and their experience beyond, within the course itself and the EIA literature.

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 understand the idea that in science you always have the data you want. He was working in a way which had significant implications for science. I was interested in the origins of these, within their previous education and their experience beyond, within the course itself and the EIA literature.

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He concludes his comments on one report by saying:

there has been little if any attempt to. . . provide a basis for a serious discussion of . . . the effects of uncertainty about the operation of the natural environment.

Going back to my recordings of the students’ group discussions, and to what they said in the interviews, I asked students to examine the data and discuss it. The issue of uncertainty was a major point. The students emphasized that the data was incomplete and that the uncertainty was very real. The issue of uncertainty was a major point. The students emphasized that the data was incomplete and that the uncertainty was very real.

Robert: I’m sure you could sit down with your numbers . . . and you could give a calculation to say that the fish would be all right / Me: be doing what? / Nick: well different interpretations. different ways of looking at the results. / Robert: you can . . . you don’t know, you can get anything you want really / Me: so recent [he laughs] / Nick: let’s think that this is the way the background information was presented . . . (the more) gave us a choice of . . . or what figures to choose / [to the group] / then you would have done your own . . . or analysis / you would have got a certain act of figures / and etc . . . the answer would be more detailed I think / Robert: yeah . . . we’d be doing our own experiments on the rivers / Nick: yeah / because we didn’t have the time or the equipment to go out to the river and do all the kinds of things we just had to use the things that we were given /

Helena: everything is not exact enough / because they don’t really know where exactly the aggregate is / there’s not been enough research done anywhere / if they were, really going to progress . . . to dig out the aggregate they’d have had / for more research done /

In other words, far from learning about the uncertainty within professional practice from the experience of uncertainty within the courses, the students discounted this experience as being merely a consequence of doing it within the educational context. They therefore wrote their documents as if their data and their conclusions were certain.

Looking again at Figure 8.4, we can see that the tutor viewed the uncertainty within the data as representing a constraint that pervades professional practice.
experience of uncertainty to the professional context, rather than the educational context.

It is clear that the students needed guidance on their attribution of the experience of uncertainty. However, the tutor’s response to this is that he had already given it. He had told them that the set of facts they were exactly as they might find in a professional. He told them it was ‘real’. He said it was what the environmental impact assessors would be using if this development actually went ahead. It is therefore important to explore how these claims may be heard.

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

Second, as the tutor had anticipated (above), the students consequently brought to the course an idealized view of science and professional practice. They drew on expectancies and assumptions about the sort of situations in which they would be given enough data to make claims with certainty. This combined with a wider belief that science necessarily achieves certainty, rather than also involving uncertainty and contentious claims within the process of developing knowledge. They also drew on an assumption that a ‘real’ report would find enough data to achieve certainty (quotas above); it would not make uncertain claims from limited data. What the tutor had not anticipated is the resilience of these assumptions — the way in which they could be sustained by a practice of discounting experience within education as ‘not real’. In effect, the students’ beliefs, their assumptions could actually enhance the experience of uncertainty that he could offer. They were even able to withstand his explicit indication of uncertainty in examples of professional EIA in his lectures. The students saw these as examples of ‘what should not have happened’; they regarded his statement rather than taking them as an indicator of a wider reality within the profession.

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

Example 2: Understanding an instruction/activity

In Example 1 I looked at the students’ attribution of an experience, when the tutor commented that his own attribution of this had been very explicit. In this second example I look at their attribution of an instruction, and the difficulty students had in the tutor’s own attribution was quite clear. Once again I identify the implications for the students’ text. This example requires some explanation of environmental assessment and the scenario. It makes an important point, with wider significance, about the need to make explicit the rationale for a course activity within the classroom and professional contexts.

The scenario

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

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

The problematic: instruction/activity

As consultants in this professional scenario they could, of course, assess the likely impact of every possible method of extraction. Clear it would be a more productive use of their time to focus on the method(s) of extraction most likely to be proposed by a future developer. (The tutor explained that this could be done by looking at the options of being cheaper, or of being least environmentally damaging and most likely to gain planning permission.) The act of choosing was therefore partly attributable to the professional context. However, in this instance, the time of the scenario of the students (and their practitioners) they could realistically assess only one method. The act of choosing one was therefore also attributable to the educational context.
this future decision about extraction methods. They therefore offer information and criteria to inform the reader in making a decision, and they illustrate the process 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 in focus 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 reframe and take on the more challenging functions of informing decisions, then they needed that crucial understanding of the nature of their "choice" of drawer within the professional scenario. They also needed a recognition that the format and function of their text was something new and unfamiliar, which they needed to learn. It involved more than simply accepting what they felt 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 announce decisions. This is perhaps the tutorial analysis of examples that is usually missed in higher education courses.

The students' reaction to the tutor's comments (quoted above) was one of confusion and interest. These effectively threw 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 about a professional and stage, their text became part of the final submission for planning permission, in which all the decisions had been taken.

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

Alan: this is what I did /

Robert: it's what's 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"

Alan: I thought our job was to pick which we thought was the best / that's what I thought /

By this time, the students had felt some of what was expected of them within a pedagogy of "learning by experience": they had made sense of the activity to be developed, and an understanding of what a professional would do. The critique meant they left the course committed.

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

Certainly for the students, as they had shifted into their different scenarios, they had nevertheless been able to sustain their actions with the knowledge of the tutor's comments.
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.

Conversely, 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 experiences provided by the course, we similarly need to be very wary of dipping into explaining an activity solely in terms of the immediate classroom procedures. We still need students to understand that they need of the rationale for the activity within the profession, and/or within the course. In particular, if students are to respect their activity within a professional context, 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 "analytical". These simply encourage students to assume that if they have followed "real" practices and "real" text, then their own text can be acceptable. Instead, we need to develop their understanding of how the text 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 scenario for the text. This is likely to seem unimportant to the experienced nurse, 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 reiterate 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 data 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 show an "expert" answer. 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

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Notes

1. I am adopting the practice of using single quotation marks around a term or phrase when I am not using the text/sentence of the writer/speaker referenced. Double quotation marks are used for actual quotation.


3. Particularly available and interesting accounts of this within sociological studies of the construction of scientific knowledge include Latour (1979; 1992) and Gilbert and Muiroy (1994).

4. Transcribe symbols used:

- Indicates a pause or hesitation, roughly half a second per dot, indicates an apparent break between units of speech, indicated by the speaker through a change of tone or a pause;
- indicates that at the point in the extract some of the original utterance has been omitted;
- indicates author’s emphasis.

5. The tutor’s account of uncertainty in EIA drew on his experience as an environmental assessor, constantly faced with the demand to make predictions from limited data, and his knowledge of the way in which EIA is usually 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, Janet and Todhunter (1998: 108) summarize the situation as follows:

Part 3

Contexts of Writing and Professional Learning
becomes visible through writing practices. 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 complexities involved in this. While I use the term 'success' in this study, I am aware that it is not unproblematic: both who and what determines success within and across contexts. Theorically, the chapter draws on a sociocultural/constructivist framework, arguing for an understanding of learning which takes account of contextually located processes of meaning-making rather than decontextualized accounts of learning.

Background and context

At UCT, certificate-based adult education provision has traditionally been non-formal. From the mid-1990s 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 (WLP). While there was substantial overlap between the two programmes, there were important distinctions in terms of student groupings. Whereas students on CAEP were predominantly community-based adult educators, Ndebele- or Afrikaans-speaking and predominantly 'black' (used to denote both 'coloured' and 'African' apartheid racial classifications), the students on the WLP were a mixture of CAEP-type students and corporate- or industry-based trainers. There was thus a strong representation of white, English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking students on the WLP courses over the years.

Provision on both these programmes was non-formal, access to the instruction being granted on the basis of previous experience. Given that the courses lacked formal accreditation, assessment took on the usual non-formal status, although certificates were awarded to students who had a high attendance record. The aim of such courses was to provide access for the further development of practitioner competence – students thus entered with the role of practitioner firmly in place, and this was built on during the programme. They were provided with an opportunity to reflect on and further develop the skills and experiences they already possessed. The notion of the 'critical reflective practitioner' (Schön 1985, 1987), explored by Elizabeth Hasdell-Malines in Chapter 10 of this volume, guided the thinking behind curriculum design and development and the teaching approaches adopted, allowing us to integrate learning and experience, and to facilitate critical thinking and problem-solving. In this way, increased possibilities for practitioner development and, I would argue, 'successful' learning were put in place. However, with the move to formalise the certificate course, the relationship between roles and learning became more complex.

9

Writing for Success in Higher Education

Janice McMillan

Introduction

Writing in higher education is a challenging task for many students. Such 'literacy acts' or individual constructive acts, are, according to Flower (1994: 19):

... mere acts of transformation, re-creation, or construction. They happen at the intersection of diverse goals, values and assumptions, where social roles intersect with personal images of one's will and one's situation ... (they) are often sites of negotiation where the meaning that emerges may reflect revolution, shedding construction, or perhaps just a temporary stagnation 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 'depression' facing non-traditional mature learners once they have crossed the formal, institutional boundary (Weil 1986; James 1993) and has 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 Flower above attests to this, and highlights how complex a process it can be. This chapter sets out to examine these issues from a particular perspective. While many students do struggle to cross epistemological boundaries in higher education and we need to be mindful of this, others succeed, often against all odds. In order to understand successful learning, this chapter turns to research exploring the learning and writing experiences of first time non-traditional mature learners. The main question it examines is what the process of constructing a 'successful' learner role entails, and how this.

Shifts from non-formal to formal

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

Many providers have responded to formalising provision. UCT responded to such calls in 1995 by introducing a new formal Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development. Many of our students – mature adult educators/trainers – now entering the course without the normal formal requirements for entry to university study. We initiated a policy of 'alternative access' and encouraged any of our students who had completed one of the two previous 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 formalised 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 increase also brought a diverse group of practitioner students on to our course, including both community-based educators and trainers and those located within a corporate or industry setting. The latter grouping included some students who already possessed undergraduate and even postgraduate university qualifications. What interested me, therefore, was to investigate and explore what possible 'intermediate combination of connections' (Fairclough 1992a) students might be adopting in the process of learning in order to be successful; I wished to understand these through the students' experiences of learning and writing.

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

Second, we understood that given that many of our learners had no experience of formal higher education, that we needed to allow for them to
develop 'academic literacy practices' which would hopefully enable them to 'discourse the discourse' (Gee 1990), or at least an important component of it. As recognized, however, the difficulties that students base with academic writing for assessment (see also Lee and Street, Chapter 2). Many studies explore the type of learning in higher education allude to this (Chin, 1995). Learning meaning in the individual does not mean that I am downplaying the social, but trying to find a starting point that is more profound socially in that it deals with human action, which must surely be at the heart of the social.

Thesen (1994: 56) highlights 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 seize the active negotiation of meaning, thereby creating meaning in the intersection of alternatives, opportunities and constraints. For Flower (1994: 14), a literate act is 'an individual constructive act . . . [which] can call for the orchestration of diverse, seemingly incommensurate practices . . . [these] also reflect the complex, even contradictory, goals and purposes that often drive meaning making.' This implies, following Clark and Flavell (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 the context of the situation, the context of 'culture' provides the range of possibilities which are competing for dominance. What the author belongs to the task, in terms of her/his own attitude towards it, beliefs about what is expected from the task, and the purposes behind that particular task, the broader cultural context and also the processes of the author and context. The context of culture therefore affects writing practices and, in turn, the text. Clark and Flavell argue that this may either rest in conflict or in patterns of privileging within the context of culture. Drawing on theories of academic literacy, Lea (1988) further explores the context, and contradictions students experience as they negotiate academic knowledge in relation to the modern, world of work, community and beyond. Lea and Lee (1984) believe that 'a central part of the learning process for students is constructed not just with the struggles between other familiar "ways of knowing" and "academic ways of knowing" which underlies different literacy practices that are associated with these.' In particular, the study shows that learning involves consciousness and challenge as students draw on prior knowledge and ways of writing and reading that have course requirements. In this process, students both construct new meanings and construct new knowledge bases. In trying to understand

Understand learning: meaning-making and negotiation in context

Learning and writing: negotiating academic literacy demands

Thesen (1994), working from a sociocultural/sociocognitive position, looks at second language student experiences of writing at university. She argues persuasively for an approach to learning which attempts to look at 'voice or subjectivity . . . [meaning] meaning in the individual' (Thesen 1996: 56), yet still sees the discourse approach should be concerned with the interactions between people in a given context rather than relationships to text. This is then for several reasons: firstly, 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 interpretation in an attempt to bring together the idea of discourse as negotiated meaning with the fundamental recognition that individuals do not have equal access to this process of negotiation (Thesen 1994: 25). This implies that learning within this perspective assigns a stronger role to the individual as agent, acting sometimes from the centre, and at other

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

The study

My research involved working with four students with whom I had a fair amount of contact in various situations throughout 1995. The students share many similarities with other adult learners in South Africa: disrupted or poor schooling, impoverished backgrounds and broken families. Two are ex-DEEC students and two are CCET. In their own ways however, they are all strikingly different. Two are South African English speaking, one English speaking, one who is Afrikaans. Their ages range from early 30s to 60s ‘with one foot in the grave’ (as the eldest herself put it).

My data consisted of interviews, informal group discussions, observations and pieces of assessed writing. I adopted an ethnographic case study approach in order to collect 'thick descriptions' of what was happening with some of my students. While my approach was, obviously, not a full ethnographic study in the anthropological sense of a social and cultural analysis, I developed an approach that allowed me to incorporate culture and context as ways of understanding learning (see Thesen 1991, Thesen 1994). I conducted two interviews with all four students – one which foregrounded their experiences as students in the class, while the other foregrounded their lives outside the class as adults, as practitioners and as learners. During the first interview, I focused on the two aims of our course and specifically their experiences of writing assignments, working in groups and relationships with others, both learners and educators. While my original study involved four students, for the purposes of this paper I have selected two which highlight contrasting patterns of interaction and meaning making.

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

Yasmine: ‘maybe I’ll go . . . tomorrow’

Yasmin, aged 37, is a single (widowed) parent of two children who lives in Mitchell’s Plain (formerly ‘a colonized squatter’s area’) with her 18-year-old son’s wife and her own 10-year-old daughter. She says that Mitchell’s Plain is divided by a railway track and that she lives on the ‘wrong side’ where gangsterism is rife and the unemployed sit around on the street corners.
Having grown up in Deep River, her family was moved to Maunsehing during the height of the Garo-Group forces' rerouted 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 and her family. After leaving school at the end of standard nine, getting married and having a child, Yasmin 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 organiser but felt that she would like to start an offer where she could work on her own. Yasmin’s experience of learning and the ways in which she dealt with the writing demands of the course was tinged with contradictions and turmoil yet ultimately with success. Writing played a big part in helping her to work through much of this conflict - both inside and outside the course.

The primary pattern of engagement Yasmin described in her learning experiences was that of conflict (Kawoos 1990) - she also adopted for a time a strategy of avoidance to her learning (Lee 1990). However, there was evidence of withdrawal and accommodation (Kawoos 1990) or reformulation (Lee 1990) in her account. Given strong linkages between her personal and learner identities, Yasmin’s experience demonstrated a fairly high sense of anxiety and conflict:

I wanted to give up at one stage.

Since she believed a lack of engagement, or the risk of conflict, often experience life difficulties and, according to Kawoos (1990:11), ‘they are unique in the intensity and breadth of their personal life difficulties’. In terms of the kind of learner role she saw for herself, Yasmin felt that she was:

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

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

there’s always this power thing.

Yasmin spoke of the conflict between herself and the ‘professionals’, other students on the course, whose perceived thinking as 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 Thornell’s comment about the different ways in which discourses ‘rub up against each other’ and how students deal with the conflict this causes; it is highlighted in the following extract of a poem by Yasmin:

O discourse.

We are being told about
The roles we play
The discourse that we follow
As if we didn’t know.

Through all of this, assignments follow,
Handouts to read and books to borrow
I think I’ll quit...

Now she is in her writing 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 difficult issues in her life:

If I feel strong about something, I dream it. Then I get up and write it down… I would like to write a book. But 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 practitioner – ‘I make 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 Yasmin wrote assignments, while she might resist writing them, she managed in some ways to ‘suspend’ the inner turmoil and anxieties she often felt. On the cover sheet of her Assignment 4 (see Appendix 2), she indicated that:

I really 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 trans-
formation 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 undermine the ambivalence she expresses towards the topic initially. There is thus a third part of the course and strong feature of the discourse of much adult and experiential learning, was something that was contrary to her preferred learning experience:

When asked if she felt she was coping with the demands of the course, this interview 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.

Nomzi’s process of meaning-making and negotiation had, therefore, to take place largely outside the social space 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 at the moment 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 assumed writing.

According to Kawoos (1990), the primary pattern of interaction is that of transformation, and it is the most integrated and yet complex pattern of engagement. Students engaging in this way arc 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 in a broadening of values, perspectives, and beliefs. Elements of this pattern were strongly visible in Yasmin’s account. For her, the importance of the relationship between her identity as adult and community worker, on the one hand, and that of learner, on the other, meant that she constantly made reference to the role that the course played in her other practice, as well as the role that her world of practice played in her learning. Nomzi 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-reflection’ was also present when Nomzi spoke of her assumed 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 Nomzi 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 see I agree with this but in other ways, I disagree. You reflect again - as if you are talking to someone else. I then repeat it to myself until I can bear it - it must make sense to me before I can write it.

These feelings about the importance of reflecting on her own experience were brought into her writing of Assignment 4. Unlike the other three students, she chose the first of the two choices (A4), 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 reflect the past.

A secondary pattern that also emerges in her account is that of accommodation. While she felt that 'life experience taught you a lot,' she did not like the university as having value and the usefulness of the curriculum and transmission process within her indication of the importance of written assessment as selling you 'right from wrong'.

In many ways, Nomzani exhibited many of the attributes of a critical reflective practitioner (Schön 1985; 1987; 1991) in that her role as a practitioner was continually under personal scrutiny. The way she engaged with her learning reflected her experiences outside the class with what she was learning - are highly indicative of this.

I learnt to think deep and also to add to my experience about how this happened in the previous time... more especially, 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 Nomzani, therefore, success on the certificate was made possible by a complex web of self-refection and meaning-making through writing for assessment. The context of the course allowed her to build up on her previous experiences, but she felt that she had actively linked her learning on the course with her 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 concerns particularly on 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 Nomzani, on the whole, they seemed more positive experiences than for Yamine. However, what emerges clearly is that each of them found ways to take action and exhibit agency in their learning which allowed them to successfully negotiate potential boundaries to acquiring the discourse.

Conclusion

In exploring these two students' experiences of learning and writing, I have argued that they show differences in which learning roles are constructed and the contexts within which learning takes place are crucial in understanding success. Success in turn needs to be understood as a process of boundary negotiation and meaning construction. For Yamine, this was through her writing, finding a way to deal with her personal feelings in ways which did not obstruct her learning on the course; for Nomzani, 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 contexts involve 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 practices, 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 see students up for failure; or at the very least, feelings of disjuncture (Woolf 1998) 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. DET was the Department of Education and Culture for 'coloured' students, and DET the Department of Education and Training for 'African/Black' students.
Appendix 2: Cover sheet for Assignment 4 of the Certificate Programme

CERTIFICATE IN ADULT EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTUAL STUDIES (EMS195W)

ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET

Name: ______________________

ASSIGNMENT NO. & TITLE: Assignment 4

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:

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

Elisabeth Hoadley-Maidment

Introduction

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

The role of academic literacies in professional education has not been addressed in the same detail as these broader issues. They are important, however, not 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 arose from work I undertook in 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-aided 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 we know, 'academic discourse' is problematic. It is widely used, but in differing ways by individual disciplines. Any discussion of students as writers must start, not with a discipline-based definition but with a linguistic one. Sociologists such as Sealey (1980) regard individual academic disciplines as discourse communities, each using language in particular ways. There are commonalities 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 a great deal. 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 of sets 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 'I' or 'we' which identify the writer. It is also common for sentences to have grammatically simple forms, such as to include large numbers of nouns and adjectives whose main function is to make meaning more precise. Sentences are frequently cloaked with highly knowledgeable language 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 of different kinds referred to as 'subgenres'. While students are not expected to have the same grasp of the concept and theories they are writing about (Gibbs 1988), student writing is still recognizable as academic writing and is unlikely to be confused with vocational writing which requires students, in particular, must already use these features because of their previous professional training and experience.

Accordingly, students are generally expected to learn these linguistic features linguistically as well as 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 are likely to 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 written about 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 is 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 discourse in class and in written course work. Mode of study is important here. Full-time students obviously have greater opportunities to practice new discourse but may be learning 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 a time, and so the complete lower pieces of written work are written so they need to learn one discourse, and possibly one genre, at a time. Finally, there are students studying to distance learning. Their main disadvantage is the lack of opportunities for practice on the new discourses internally. 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

These of whose interest in academic literacies is grounded in socialities and language teaching are familiar with the practical implications of linguistic approaches for teaching more generally. A second generation of academic discourses, has been, or has been influenced by a separate but related approach to academic discourse, which draws on the work of the French philosopher, Prasch (1972). This approach focuses on knowledge as being fragmented and is concerned with the expression of the abstract ideas which make up the concepts and theories of academic disciplines. The focus is on the development of skills of analysis. Entry to the discourse communities appears to the learner as learning to frame ideas in relation to concepts and theories and to use the language of the academic community appropriately. In the social sciences the evidence supports the theories is taken from everyday life, requiring students to reflect on everyday experience by creating a frame drawn from the concepts and ideas they learn in course work. Norrie (1992), for example, finds that students become aware of this change as described here by a student who had just completed the Open University course in social science foundation. It was a whole new way of looking at everyday life, to see everyday objects, even, as described concepts and situations, and you had to get your brain into that mode of thinking to understand it. There were specific concepts within individual disciplines such as geography that policy and politics, and last stage of the course was all about how to frame those ideas in individual ways. It was exciting and fun knowing that you could just pick out from any pool you wished. That’s where my confidence really came.

The theory emphasizes communication, although Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student: tutor dialogue as having a number of feedback loops. The 'language' of these dialogues may not consist solely of spoken or written words, however. In architecture, for example, the 'language' is a combination of visual language (drawing of ground plans, elevations, and so on) and spoken language which the professional needs in order to explain the visual language to clients and people such as surveyors, engineers and builders. In other words, each profession needs a language for talking about practice. A dialogue which is part of a course does not have to end at the end of the course work is likely to start with a problem. Students ask for help from the tutor because they are stuck and a conversation or an exercise which proceeds through questions and answers accompanies the writing, demonstration or musical performance. The conversation provides opportunities to practice the language of the profession and to refine the professional knowledge appropriately.

Although popular, the reflective practitioner model has been heavily criticized (Dowson, 1993; Ernst, 1995; Bowd, 1995). Ernst draws attention to Schön’s overwhelming interest in the creative aspects of professional development and is concerned that in real life there are few opportunities for deliberate reflection as Schön describes it. Schön concludes that the theory is most useful as a theory to describe metacognition in skilled behaviour, it is not, however, concerned in this context with the role of language or communication in professional learning. If we turn to the way in which students develop the discourse to communicate professionally, there are other problems with Schön’s theory.

One is his failure to take into account the collective learning that occurs in face-to-face practical classes. For the individual student the dialogue with the tutor occupies only a small proportion of time—perhaps five minutes in a two-hour session. In-between times students get on with their own work: they practice the skills and ask for help when they get stuck. More importantly, they interact with other students who wander around the room talking, watching by observing what others are doing, they discuss their work and provide help for each other, and they learn by overhearing the dialogue between teachers and other students. In other words, learning, in a ‘practical’ of the sort Schön describes is a social dialogue experience in which students are part of a collective experience which enables them both to use the technique and apply it directly to practice, albeit in a sheltered situation. Analysis of work-based learning settings would doubtless show similar patterns.

The second failure relates to the particular role of the communication in the everyday learning process. Here communication is not simply for talking about practice but also a vital way of carrying out practice. The theory is true of teaching students where there is feedback on their communication skills in the same way that a student architect needs feedback on his drawing skills or feedback on his use of surgical instruments. In face-to-face teaching this is often done through videotaped role plays. Hence, writing...
Issues raised in the survey

Although the questionnaire was brief and relatively unstructured, the results it produced were valuable for the common concerns that they revealed. The importance these academics gave to the development of skills in expressing academic argument reflects the centrality of written academic argument to teaching in the UK university system. In social sciences (and arts and humanities), written academic arguments are regarded as the key way of judging whether a student has understood the concepts and issues of a course and developed higher-order cognitive skills such as analytic and synthetic. At the same time it has been shown that knowledge and argument are differentially defined and constructed by different discipline, and that 'new' disciplines related to professions such as nursing also have individual requirements (Brewer and Wason 1982). In professional education the emphasis on traditional forms of academic writing such as thesis and assignments is to be questioned, particularly where programmes have a substantial practice component. However it is through weak ties of context. This in turn raises questions about the relationship between vocational training and particular forms of academic writing.

When we turn to the skill of linking personal experience to theory there is another important dimension. The way we normally talk or write about personal experience is in narrative form. Students on professionally-related courses need opportunities to practice linking narrative to argument. This operates at a number of levels, from organizing ideas to the use of appropriate grammatical forms. The difficulty identified in the survey is that of turning the (narrative) experience into a form which illustrates an academic argument based on abstract concepts, issues and themes. One way to teach this is to work with forms which students find comfortable in using, such as reports and case studies and small investigative projects. These often enable students to draw on work experience for content and also write about this experience in narrative form initially, while at a later point, for example in a dissertation, they have to analyse and synthesize this in academic terms.

The main concerns of the academics is summed up in the word 'argument'. The response point to a desire for students to improve practice and theory in a context where the assessment strategy is based on traditional academic metrics. In addition, it is important to consider the discipline, features, stages of support and learning and how these may affect students' development as academic writers. Mitchell (1995), writing about the development of academic argument, says that the best of learning in the UK education system is spoken language. This is seen as 'open and transformative' while written language is 'the site of closure: the assignment which marks the end of a period of study' (Mitchell 1995: 135). Spoken language provides opportunities for students to try things out. For most students this means discussing concepts and ideas, both inside and outside class. Academic discourse is learnt within a social and collective setting, involving both classroom and student-student interaction. The
course what they will be expected to be able to do in written form by the end. This in turn should influence the assessment strategy. Adopting an approach which develops students’ academic literacies, by building on those they already have, may mean rethinking the academic genres in which they are being asked to write early in the course. It also means making sure that students recognize where an academic task such as a project may differ from projects they have done elsewhere. For example, it is not always clear to students how projects differ from essays. Open University students receive assignment handouts containing guidance on completing the written assessments. These often refer to ‘arguments’ while at the same time failing to say explicitly that projects must relate the data collected to the issues and concepts presented in the course. Since many professional students are familiar with descriptive reports and probably write them regularly themselves, they may feel that the only conclusions they have to reach are those drawn from the data themselves. In other words, they approach an academic assignment in the way they would prepare a report for a case conference, without realizing the difference in both discourse and genre.

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

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

There is a need to develop systems for part-time and distance-learning courses which substitute for the kind of communication experience/gain in a classroom so that students can begin to reframe their experience using academic discourse as a basis for 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 practising 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 tasks for learning rather than conflating the learning and assessment function. Reflective diaries, taping experiences and using questionnaires as frameworks for the analysis of critical incidents can all provide opportunities to practise 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, there 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 ‘glossaries’ points to a changing role for tutors. This means that tutors must feel confident to teach students how to make the links between practice and academic study. For many years in the United Kingdom there has been a movement concerned with ‘language across the curriculum’. Although rooted in schools, this is equally relevant to university education. While professional education programmes with practice elements are increasingly tackling these issues (Rivers and Watson 1992), they must also be addressed in relation to more traditional open and distance-learning courses.

Conclusion
The real challenge for many professional courses, as teaching methods change in response to new technology, is ensuring that the aims and objectives drawn from the professional requirements of the course are amenable within systems designed for academic learning. Courses such as those I have described being together two approaches to learning: ‘traditional’ academic learning of theoretical academic knowledge and ‘reflective practice’ where the doing informs and is informed by the learning. The first is concerned with developing a range of higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis, while the latter focuses on improved performance.

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

Barry Sierer

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 their chances of promotion, by adding to their existing qualifications. They may wish to improve their professional effectiveness and confidence, 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 (OUE), 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.
within an area of activity such as teachers' professional development, that the struggles overcome what constitutes important professional knowledge for teachers are not always perceived. Nevertheless, the present research has drawn from this area of work as its theoretical framework. The project can be seen as a contribution to this area in that it examines 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 tutors.

The Open University MA in education

At any one time there are about 4000 students in the OU's MA in Education programme in the UK, Ireland and continental western Europe. They are distance learners, working in comparative isolation with multimedia materials and submitting written assignments to a tutor, whose views are at least partially influential, (optional) group tutorials. 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

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

- E421 Language and literacy in social context
- E413 Curriculum, learning and assessment
- E425 Child development in social context
- E426 Gender moves in education: equality and difference
- E427 Adult learners' curriculum, equity and diversity in education
- E428 Primary education: the basic curriculum
- E429 Primary education: assessing and planning learning
- E424 Science education
- E125 Teaching education
- E426 Researching mathematics classrooms
- E427 Adult learners educational needs
- E428 Education, training and employment
- E434 Mentoring
- E429 Educational management in action
- E424 Understanding school management
- E433 Effective leadership and management in education
- E434 Assigning and co-ordinating teachers
- E435 Educational research in action

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 and within various academic disciplines, to the comparatively under-researched area of professional-oriented teaching at programme 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 viewing academic writing as a transparent medium for representing knowledge, or as a set of rules to which students need to accommodate, this perspective views academic institutions as sites of power, and academic writing as a site where power is exercised and contested. This perspective problematizes these practices, and recognizes that students' so-called failures in academic writing may be explained by, for example, their struggle to reconcile their own identities, and purposes for writing, with the authority and control of the institution (Bazdil, 1998). 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, please refer to the Editor's 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 areas that has received the most attention is the so-called 'disciplinary practices' of the various academic practices (see Schoe 1988, 1987; Klin 1984, and Ernest 1994). It is from this body of work that such widely used terms as 'reflexive writing' and 'disciplinary practices' have been borrowed to examine the ways in which professional knowledge is encoded in language (Gunnarsson et al., 1997), but apparently none has examined the reasons for written language which have become associated with professional training. My starting point is that it is in the language practices,

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

An analysis of specifications for written assignments

Most of the chapter reports on the results of one of the main strands in the research project - that 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 are expected to do. The specifications are standardized 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 booklet. 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 very wide range of types of writing. Table 11.2 lists a broad sketch of the types of writing and the genre categories, required for written assignments across the 18 modules in the programme. These are very superficial analyses of the diversity of types of writing students are required to carry out within the programme. Nevertheless, from this it is clear that an individual student's programme across the three modules could require them to produce as many as a dozen different types of writing. The meaning of these labels, like 'essay' or 'project report', varies from module to module, and even within individual modules, even when the same genre label is used. So it is only really by looking at individual assignment specifications that the meaning of these categories 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. Any explicit explanation of the conventions the student is expected to use.
2. Warnings in which students' professional work as teachers is referred to, and ways in which students are advised to refer to their own professional work.
3. Ways in which the questions appear to 'position' students with respect to ideas in the course.
4. Uses of imperative.

Explicit explanations of the conventions the student is expected to use

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

Assignments 01, 02 and 05 are conventional essay questions.

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

Although the meanings of the key terms in this passage ('descriptive', 'prescriptive', 'critical', 'analysis') are not defined or illustrated, this is one of the very few attempts made by 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 emphasised that, while the contrast between these two pieces of advice may be noteworthy, they are the only two instances across the 18 modules where the question of 'voice' is explicitly considered at all.

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

It is important to understand that the E380 assignments are reports on management rather than academic essays. We have found from past experience that some students do not achieve at high a grade as they might have, had they appreciated the differences between these 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 lamponing to some extent the expectations conventionally associated with academic essay writing. The sarcastic tone adopted when describing the way students 'are sometimes tempted to display their erudition' is not a description that would be universally recognized as one of 'best practice', even for academic essays. Moreover, there is an assumption that achieving clarity and logic is merely a matter of avoiding an over-dependence on quotations and the use of academic jargon, and that students will have been helped to understand what is expected of them by being told what is not expected of them.

This point notwithstanding, the passage is significant for the purposes of this analysis, in the sense that it represents the only attempt in any of the 18 assignment booklets to recognize explicitly the fact that students may be approaching the course with a set of assumptions about academic writing that differ from the expectations for E380, based on their previous experience of study, and to point out some of the differences between management reports and academic essays.

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

Of interest here was evidence of course teams' expectations of the ways in which students should and should not draw upon their own professional
experinece when answering the question or completing the task assigned. This means that any indication of how modern 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 professions such as professional and academic traditions are played through, and how they affect 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 (such as '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 if of the professional development achieved as a result of study -- though no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically. The examples of essay-style questions given in Table 11.5 provide an indication of the way the students' professional work is referred to (if at all) in these modules. There is clearly no expectation underlying these assignments that students are to be expected to, or even to, draw on their professional experience as teachers in order to attempt, and succeed at, the writing task. Indeed, too many modules in this category there is an implication that students would be penalised if they include more than a passing reference to their professional work when constructing their assignments.

In some modules ('Science Education', 'Research in Mathematics Classrooms', 'Mentoring', 'Primary Education (both modules)', and 'Effective Leadership and Management') students are expected to make visible the professional knowledge they have achieved through their study of the course -- though here again no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically. 'Mentoring', for example, represents the relationship between the student's professional activity and the writing task in this way:

Project 4 is designed to help you look back in a structured manner over the experience of mentoring, and then to look forward to possible developments arising out of that experience.

In step 1-4 you are asked to provide a critical review of the mentoring programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the: mentor, the mentee; and your own professional development.

In step 5 you are asked to examine the concept of the 'mentoring school' and explore the possibilities of mentoring in other staff development processes within your institution.

You are expected to locate 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 mentoring experience in support of your conclusions.

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| Table 11.4 A selection of imperatives taken from assignment specifications |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Evaluate                     | Justify           |
| Critically evaluate         | Construct a conceptual plan |
| Answer                      | Describe          |
| Critically appraise         | Give a brief description |
| Examine                     | Describe and analyse |
| Critically examine          | Write a critical account of what happens |
| Critically discuss          | Provide a report when you apply your own methods |
| Critical reflection         | Reflect on your plan |
| Critical reflect upon       | Outline |

modules. All modules were very similar, however, in their reluctance to define these imperatives. With only one or two exceptions, the course team's ideas about 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 diversity of the 'codes' which students need to track in order to complete their assignments successfully. How, for example, should students understand the difference 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 essentially interchangeable, whereas a conscientious student might reasonably seek to distinguish the meanings of these different key terms.

Discussion

Since constraints do not permit a discussion here of the other strands of the research project, such as the awareness of students and teachers and the analysis of students' written assignments and the written feedback received from their tutors. These will be reported in the future. Nevertheless, the following discussion, of issues arising from the foregoing analysis of the assignment booklets for the modules in the OU's MA programme, is intended to some extent by promoting further discussion and analysis.

These analyses of the assignment booklets raise a number of important questions, which extend well beyond the superficial issue of inadequacies of feedback. Is the assignment booklet in the OU's MA programme achieving the purpose for which students are being selected? This question, in turn, raises the issue of what the purposes of the MA programme should be.

Furthermore, this lack of guidance on how to construct the linguistically adequate assignments is a clear indication of the difficulty that some students face in learning how to construct assignments that meet the expectations of their academic colleagues and teachers.
teachers are expected to demonstrate by means of their highly refined writing forms. The reluctance of course teams to make explicit the kinds of professional knowledge they aim to promote through written assignments suggests that these teams have either not given adequate consideration to this area or that they have not deemed it important to make their aims visible to students. Many of the privileged genres of writing in the programme have been most part been imposed—possibly without conscious deliberation—from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and may therefore not be appropriate for promoting the professional knowledge that is (implicitly) sustainable within these courses.

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

The analysis also revealed enormous variation within and between modules, in the styles of writing required, in the kind of advice on writing style given by the tutors, and in 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 strand of the research, it became clear that the most successful students started from scratch, in their 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 were also reinforced by other insights emerging from the analysis of the assignment booklets. This analysis revealed how consistently tutors use their feedback to try to induct their students into a way of using language, which is considered by tutors not only to be unfamiliar to students but also to be an essential part of learning within their field of study. This process mirrors the characteristic function performed by specifications for written assignments, which appear to call for genres of academic writing imported from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, rather than genres of writing which have been deliberately adopted, or developed, in order to support the formation of professional knowledge deemed by course teams, and indeed by students, as important.

At this stage, I think it would be useful to 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 by itself 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 disabled when they start. They struggle to identify, and learn how to use, specialized academic forms 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 is they sign up for the MA for professional reasons, and suddenly find that they are positioned as novice academics rather than as, say, senior in-house advisors. Much 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 specialized community of academic discourse. At best the subliminal message is: here is how to be a sociologist, or an applied critical linguist, or a psychologist, or a management theorist. The assumption is surely, but not quite, that these students aspire to be professional academics like members of the course teams and like their own tutors, rather than fewer 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 career, and this experience is relevant to the question of how they adapt to the new role. This is the professional culture with which they identify, and it is from the perspective of the professional role, or the way of thinking that is associated with a professional role, that the MA students bring to their studies. 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 literary practices in these programmes are predicated on an assumption that they are doing just that.

In this sense, the academic-professional divide is inappropriate: both orders of discourse are professional. The issue, therefore, is one of two professional cultures clashing: the professional culture of schoolteaching and the (highly-sustained) professional culture of the academy. Whereas schoolteachers embark on their studies in order to enhance their effectiveness and, or/within the professional culture of schoolteaching, the discursive practices of the academy position them as novice academics. Part of the explanation for this must lie in the way that institutions of higher education use language to sustain and legitimate the skills of the teacher, which is, in an ideology which positions students of any type as relatively powerless (Barrett, 1989). The adherence to a model of the teacher which brings to their studies, and indeed the discourse and knowledge that schoolteachers manage to construct for themselves as professionals as a result of their studies, are only sanctioned by the institution when they can be socially realized in the language of the novice academic.

I would speculate that the literary practices that have grown up around the study of education originated in contexts where people studying education appeared to have a ‘metalinguage’ for discussing vital aspects of academic writing. Terms such as ‘argument’, ‘critical’ and ‘analysis’, which were often used in course materials and in their tutorials 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 the type of discourse with which they are familiar at school, since in these studies the particular forms of cultural knowledge that enable other students quickly to identify the discursive ground rules operating within their courses and to produce forms of writing which sustain those ground rules. Nevertheless, it is an emerging with which all students on such programmes could potentially react.

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 students 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 these programmes have evolved. We need to think more imaginatively, in order to offer genres of academic writing to MA students which provide real support for professional learning, and to problematize the assumptions about academic writing which underlie our advice to students and our work with fellow tutors.

**Implications for theory**

Although the analysis is still at an early stage, the project has already been able to offer some tentative suggestions about the theoretical understanding of academic literacy practice, introduced at the beginning of this chapter (and more fully in the Editors’ Introduction to this volume), and at the same time contribute in a small way to the further elaboration of a more pluralistic and culturally sensitive perspective on the study of writing in higher education. The considerable range of genres of academic writing which confront MA students in the course of their studies, and the variety of ways students are expected to construct the kinds of knowledge which could and should be sustainable within such programmes, and to develop forms of writing which facilitate the acquisition of such knowledge. Indeed, it might be that conventional academic genres of writing serve to constrain teachers’ ability to construct professional knowledge for themselves.

**Implications for practice**

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