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Editors' Introduction

Mary R. Lea and Barry Stierer

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

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

Second, we have a strong interest, as educational researchers, in what we will refer to as social practice perspectives on understanding student writing in higher educations. 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 a relevance in more traditional settings as well.

Background

The developing research area of student writing in higher education is a highly topical one for two major reasons. Increasingly, in many countries, universities are becoming subjected to ‘teaching quality audit’ 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 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 to this perspective to make it possible for learners to enter higher education for training and retraining at a number of different points in their lives. As a consequence of these changes in the student body, universities are increasingly offering not only ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ courses in order to help non-traditional students to cope with the demands of university study, but also new-style courses featuring new writing and assessment practices. In parallel with these developments is a growing recognition of the importance of embedding support for student writing within the mainstream curriculum.

The contributors to this collection approach writing in higher education as a social practice (see, for example, Street 1984; 1989; Gee 1986; Lankshear 1997) which is embedded in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the cultures of academic disciplines in higher education. The social practice perspective adopted by all the contributors reflects an important conceptual shift in the study of student writing in higher education. Most of the existing work in this area approaches student writing from an essentially ‘skills-based’ perspective. That is, writing in higher education is assumed to be a competence which, once acquired, enables students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in virtually any context. The qualities of ‘good writing’ are assumed to be self-evident, and largely a matter of learning and mastering universal rules of, for example, grammar, usage and word organisation. Explanations for students who experience problems with writing tend to locate the problem as a deficit in the students rather than question the way in which the ‘ground rules’ of academic writing become established and negotiated in particular academic contexts. This traditional ‘skills-based’ approach is manifest most clearly in the growing tendency to confine the teaching of writing to marginal ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ units, rationed largely for students deemed to be insufficiently able to accommodate themselves to the more traditional, elite-oriented approaches to teaching and learning.

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 the 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 curriculum delivery within clearly defined academic disciplines to interdisciplinary courses;
- the growth of vocationally orientated provision, including courses for professional training, retraining and in-service training;
- the move away from fixed progression through degree programmes;
- the increasing use of modular programmes;
- the diversification of assessment methods incorporating a wider range of written genres (such as accreditation of prior learning, use of portfolios for assessment).

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

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

- The changing context in higher education forms an integral feature of setting and assessment practices, rather than mere background;
- To understand what ‘counts’ as ‘good writing’ in higher education requires an understanding of the cultures 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 into current trends and developments in the field of academic writing. They are based on the best research into the complexities of teachers and the impact of our participation in academic writing practices in universities in the world, and also on the academic and professional backgrounds upon which they draw to support their arguments. Although many of the authors in this volume, broadly described as 'social science research' style, is by no means true of all of them. The concern of some authors is to present a greater understanding of some aspect of the student experience, while others have written about the student experience in order to analyze and critique appropriate teaching and learning processes.

The result of this background research is a collection of 16 chapters, each of which is a synthesis and analysis of the body of work engaged in by practitioners in this field.

In the sections that follow, we have drawn out what we feel are the main ideas that are presented in these chapters as a whole. We have organized these ideas into a broad overview of the three broad themes that recur throughout the volume:

1. Writing in the disciplines: the challenge of new contexts
2. Writing and the teacher's role in the curriculum
3. Writing and student identity

Writing in the disciplines: the challenge of new contexts

Until fairly recently the prevailing view of academic writing, and possibly also of writing in general, appeared to be that writing was both homogeneous and transparent, and that it was therefore important to expect students to be as competent in writing as they are in other areas of their studies. However, writing in history is not the same as writing in psychology; writing in fields such as business studies or environmental studies requires engagement with a range of disciplinary genres. Much of the work in the field of disciplinary genres has been undertaken at school level in Australia (Ballard and Martin 1993). In terms of higher education, this focus on disciplinary differences takes little account of the nature of writing in interdisciplinary environments or in emergent disciplinary areas. Many of the chapters in this volume therefore challenge the view that teaching fixed disciplinary genres, as a strategy for supporting students writing, is the way to go. Instead, an emphasis on writing in both old and emergent disciplinary areas. Mike Breen argues in Chapter 1 that it can be seen that what is most valued are traditional academic discipines such as the field of writing within English discipline as constituting a class of privileged and emerging discourse communities might make it. He suggests, therefore, that discourse communities are central to understanding for students writing themselves into a 'disciplinary politics'. This is also essentially over the new and emergent disciplines, such as in its own right, and is an essential feature of the new disciplines are crucial to our understanding at student writing.

Mary Less and Barry Street, in Chapter 2, focus on disciplinary diversity and the challenges this poses for teachers. They discuss the implications of this for the writing of students, and the need for teachers to consider the need to adapt their teaching to the needs of students writing within a particular discipline. They also discuss the importance of understanding the purpose of writing in different contexts, and the need for teachers to develop a clear understanding of the purpose of writing in different contexts.

Discourse communities one might assume. He suggests, therefore, that discourse communities are central to understanding the challenges faced by students writing themselves into a 'disciplinary politics'. This is also essentially over the new and emergent disciplines, such as in its own right, and is an essential feature of the new disciplines are crucial to our understanding at student writing.
study. His analysis draws upon interviews with nursing students and teaching staff, and upon examples of students’ written assignments. He argues that ‘[a]ll concept like “writing position” cannot be fully or neatly understood without a discipline-specific understanding of what counts as knowledge and what counts in an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the politics of internal and external conflict, as realised in the politics of the discipline’. The study of dance is not, strictly speaking, professional training as such. Nevertheless, Sally Mitchell and her colleagues offer some interesting discussion in Chapter 5 of the tension between practical/theoretical 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 some of the broader issues at stake in academic writing. This is true of most of the book, and the distressing conclusion one is left with is that the old and new pressures conflict, that the two ways of working are at odds, and that the old pressures can be said to undermine the new. It is clear that the new pressures are not going away, and that the old pressures will not go away. However, the two sets of pressures are not necessarily in conflict, and they can be reconciled.

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Writing and orientationally oriented study in universities: are the ‘old’ genres up to the job?

Universities have been involved in the training and updating of professionals for a very long time. Indeed it has sometimes been said, only partly seriously, that the universities have been successful in placing themselves as providers of training for virtually every professional group except...
process. Why, then, should we conceptualize the work of student writers as being any different? In her study of mature adult students, Evans’ (1988) further explores the importance of the self by making distinctions between the ‘autobiographical self’, the ‘discourse self’ and the ‘self as author’.

In Chapter 6, Peffers Gross examines the nature of the personal in student writing, and suggests that in their journal writing students were able to present a strong autobiographical 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 reflexively 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 their 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 in creative 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 joins it, steering between the Scylla and Charybdis of ‘performance’ and ‘competence’ is no easy task. Whereas ‘competence’ may be associated with a student writer’s in-built creativity and therefore implies writing cannot be taught, ‘performance’ may suggest that writing can be reduced to ‘rules of realization’ or ‘transferable skills’. For Scott, neither encapsulates the real tensions that are present for students in their negotiations of the writer’s sense of self in the contrasting worlds of the university and the school.

In Chapter 3, Rox Newall, Rory Clark and Rachel Rimmershame 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 the values and beliefs underpinning institutions. All these messages may create contradictions for students in terms of their own identity. Students inevitably receive feedback from their tutors in terms of evaluation of themselves, if they receive feedback indicating that their work is inadequate this early becomes translated into feelings of personal inadequacy. Discouraging feedback, therefore, affects students’ self-evaluations.

Mary Lea takes a rather different approach to the nature of identity when she explores in Chapter 6 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 conferences 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 others see issues of identity and personalisation as central to their model of academic literacy which recognises the value of the beliefs and assumptions about writing and knowledge that students bring to the academic. 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 9, tensions and conflicts arise when students are required to write within the context of their course. The authors draw here on Harri’s model of personal identity formation in offering a socially oriented explanation for the choreographer and the writing tasks. One of the ideas that they explore is how in choreography the student has to ‘make a case for her dance as a successful realization of a dance idea’, with clear connections with the writing process.

On reading the chapters in this volume we are left with a strong impression that student academic writing is concerned with much more than the reproduction, or even the representation, of ideas. The whole process of writing involves making meaning in a very specific academic context, both the new and the old. The authors point to instances where knowledge, and therefore inevitably 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 chapters in this volume illustrate repeatedly that in their writing, student academic knowledge is not neatly taken up by students and transmitted back to their tutors through the process of assessment. Instead, students in both new and old disciplinary areas are finding ways in which they can use their writing as a vehicle for the exploration of what counts as knowledge in the new contexts of today’s higher education.
Part 1
Student Writing: Practices and Contexts

1

Academic Writing in New and Emergent Discipline Areas

Mike Baynham

Introduction

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

So what does the novice student, who is asked to write like a sociologist, at times like a philosopher, yet again like a scientist and finally as a reflective practitioner? Much of the literature on disciplinary cultures 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 (Bernham et al. 1995; Lee et al. 1995; Gething 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 context within which they are expected to write, or more specifically the disciplines they are writing themselves into. But I would also like you to keep in your mind's eye the image of the harassed first-year nursing student, hurrying from lecture to tutorial, back-pack full of photocopied journal articles, notes and guidelines for an essay on the sociology of nursing, a clinical report, a case study, a reflective journal. They are certainly living disciplinary and textual heterogeneity.
Recent advances in the understanding of disciplines and disciplinarity (see Messer-Davies et al. 1995) emphasize that, rather than being neat, homogeneous, and discrete communities, academic disciplines are neither hierarchically constituted nor invariable. Rather, they are a set of social, organizational, and intellectual practices that can be understood as the formation of discursive communities, where the boundaries between and within disciplines are fluid, students are learning to talk 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 "text-based," linguistic approach assumes a relatively homogeneous discipline, with text types to be discovered, analyzed, and taught. The third, a "process-based," approach proposed here investigates student writing at both the text and practice levels, 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 simply blurred, the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics that are produced. Lax and Street (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 student writing as a whole and product, and the ways in which student learning is shaped by these practices. A concept like "writing position" cannot be fully or richly understood within the context of a universal framework of what counts as knowledge and what counts as a authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the awareness of internal diversity and conflict, as realized in the policies of the discipline.

So where does this leave the student writer? In the concluding section of this chapter, I will argue that a good writing pedagogy must take into account the concerns of disciplinarity, disciplinarianism and consequent writing positions central— in other words, as Goff (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we must "teach the conflict."
Table 1.1: The disciplinary politics of nursing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice-based</th>
<th>Professionalized</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical knowledge</td>
<td>Theoretical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterogeneous discipline base</td>
<td>Heterogeneous discipline base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical subjects (positivist)</td>
<td>Ethical subjects (interpretative/critical)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Processes of disciplinization: nursing as a 'proper' discipline; nurse educators as 'proper' academics

Gender politics of the nursing profession: 'doctors and nurses'

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

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

There is a big gap between those working in theoretical areas and those in practical areas which is nowhere near being bridged and it will be a long time before it is bridged. This puts students in an interesting position. It is probably less problematic now but 5-10 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. Nowadays there is an increasing number of university-trained nurses practicing, that has started to change but the older understanding has not been resolved. This is largely due to the political climate in the hospital where there is a dominance of the medical approach to health care and there is an issue of how nurses fit into that. It's very complicated. If I had to define it, it would be hard to envisage any sort of discipline unity or clarification as to what is appropriate in the discipline for a long time.

(Lecturer interview)

I think those 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 do we teach them in real nursing but it's more than that, and I think that the faculty has to understand

(Lecturer interview)

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

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

(Student interview)

The same student identifies confusing differences between the kinds of writing that are expected of her in different parts of the programme. But for medical, surgical, if you have to write about care for a person with AIDS, you either know or you don't know. This semester we had a case on cardiac failure and that was another one where you have to go and read how the heart works, how it pumps, where does it go wrong and why does the patient present with each and each and you have to learn. I did learn from that assignment. But for this assignment, I felt that for me it was good because I spent time thinking about it, I didn't do much reading, I didn't learn very much because certain things didn't 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 I 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 answerable to, but we were never taught why nurses need autonomy, why you should feel 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 people that practice in the public arena 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 scientific perspective and the interpretive or post-positivist approach, 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 fact has traditions. Apart from - I suppose there is a clear division between those that approach it from a scientific point of view and those who approach it from humanities. I don't know that they are in any way competitive, or at least theoretically they are not competitive.

Interviewer: They deal with different aspects.

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

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

Another lecturer speaks more directly about the tensions between the scientific and humanities-based components of the curriculum:

The major tension I would have to face is that I started in the K. programme which was very much a humanities programme and we did things like important skills to develop a student's thinking, their critical writing skills, there is much less emphasis on how to state. 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 ethics and law and critical thinking and the humanities, the meaning of caring, the meaning of person. So the assignments that I had made were really bad. I thought, I can't believe that these people are in the third year of their programme and they cannot write, they cannot think, they cannot critique other people's work. So that was a real dilemma for me and I think that was the tension for the faculty, we had this terrible background between one group of people feeling that one campus wasn't teaching how to nurse and the other tension between positivist and critical hermeneutical versions of what counts as knowledge, the shift towards professionalization of nursing, the emphasis on nursing as a 'proper' academic discipline are common to the main within which the students are writing. I will illustrate this in the next section with an example from a first-year undergraduate writing task.

Academic Writing in New Disciplinary Areas

Professionals 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 in 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.

Students taking up writing positions: voicing in the nursing essay

Drawing on notions of 'authorising', 'authority' and 'authorisation' of youth statements (see Lindgren 1993), I will examine a range of ways in which student writers appropriate positions and strategies which undermine the writer's voice and the voice of others. The first section of the essay will examine the ways in which students appropriate positions and strategies which undermine the writer's voice and the voice of others.
Here are some examples of the two contrasting ways in which the student writers' constructed narratives in their essays. The first is an authorization based on an experience of research typically do:

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

(Kirzten)

Kirzten's statements about nurses' need for autonomy and authority, in which greater autonomy is shown on the part of nurses are shown to be improving care for the patient, are authorized by examples from experience through choosing appropriate true, positive, true, positive, experiences. The same is significantly reinforced when the writer uses the 'personal communication' referencing convention to authorize a particular statement, based on experience from the field rather than from an academic source. Immediately following this, Kirzten authorizes a statement by quoting it to an academic reference:

According to Kirzten (1988) nurses have been making independent decisions regarding management of their patients without wanting to accept accountability for their actions. So Kirzten'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 Kirzten's essay, mine draws on both the authorisation, from experience and the academic sourcing strategy, other essays, such as Sue's (1994) and Lorraine's (1994) do not rely almost entirely on the academic sourcing strategy. Virtually every statement they make can be traced back to an academic source."

Ironically, however (1987) states that some nurses themselves are reluctant to receive responsibility and accountability for their actions, as they are 'low risk takers' and fear mistakes. However, a study done by Kramer and Schramelberg (1998, cited in Collins and Henderson 1991, 255) claims that nurses preferred to work in an environment which encouraged autonomous practice. Furthermore, Schoon (1992) confirmed their claims and concluded that a number of nurses, including her own, have discovered a positive link between autonomy and job satisfaction.

(Sue)

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

In the health care system the doctors have the most autonomy and authority this male-dominated profession used the path to professionalism to ensure themselves of financial security and autonomy (Short and Sharman 1987:1991). Nurses believe that if they follow this same path to professionalism they too will have an increase in financial rewards, respect, autonomy and authority as seen by others who previously benefitted from their standing as a profession. This push for nurses to become professionals puts a great strain on the so called doctor nurse relationship, the college of surgeons assured that the medical practitioner was the natural leader of the health care team and that there should be a revival of trust and loyalty on the part of nurses (Palmer and Short 1993:155). The doctor still dominates the health care system and we see that through nurses pushing for professionalism that they are no longer seen as a loyal part of the health care team.

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

(Karen)

In Karen's essay we find examples both of the academic sourcing strategy, with quoted statements attributed to sources read, and the unattributed appeal to experience. Nurses believe that this is not true and that doctors should be educated to have a greater appreciation of nursing theory and practice, that decision making procedures should be reviewed and that changes that occur in hospital administration could ease tension between nurses and doctors. The arguments are voiced, not from the research literature, but through the mouths of generalized doctors and nurses. Take the following statement, from a later stage of Karen's essay:

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

Deoder's E grade, according to the subject outline, 'represents a performance which reflects little understanding, or gives little evidence of a serious attempt to meet the expectations of the assigned task'. Her essay starts with the following:

"Many nurses have been shown to be in the professional standing as an argumentative goal in advancing the autonomy of nurses and health care consumers. In particular, it has been said that it will increase nurses' autonomy and status, and therefore their capacity to achieve the aims of the market, and fulfill their professional responsibilities."

The market's comments are as follows:

You have quoted this word for word from the subject outline without acknowledging your sources. The market encourages the reader to look at this essay as an example of a well researched essay. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore why this writer made these choices, but it is clear that the shift into 'we' is a significant shift into an expert's voice. In this phrase the writer refers to the reader's own experiences. As writers we can consciously take risks, use strategies which boost dominant conventions based in informed choice. We can also produce diverse, creative texts. But this is based on awareness of the options. A writer who has not been made aware of these options is less able to make informed choices."

Deoder's appropriation of wordings which are bound to spring to the attention of the reader/marker who probably wrote them is perhaps

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to back up or elaborate an argumentative position that he has already introduced. The strategy is therefore quite different from that of Stier or Lorrain in which the text is constructed almost entirely from sourced material.

'Teach the conflicts'

In this chapter I have somewhat complicated the picture of student academic writing practices within new and emergent discipline areas along the lines suggested by Goggin (1995). The skills-based approach to the teaching of academic writing assumes that there was a 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 'guesstimating' - representations of disciplinary identity which posit them as essentially passive in relation to the work in hand - we must begin to make visible and available the machinery which produces the university's disciplines and its multiple discourses.

Ball et al. (1990: 357)

Where the disciplinary positions are conflicted, overlapping or indeed blurred (see Geertz, 1973, cited in Klein 1993) the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics that is produced. So where does this leave the student writer? In this section I argue that academic writing pedagogy must make the concerns of disciplinarity, disciplinarianism and consequent writing positions central - in other words, as Goff (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we must 'teach the conflicts'.

As I suggested earlier in the nurse education case study, a major conflict is between, on the one hand, the practice-oriented account of nursing and the experiential ways of knowing that it makes authoritative and, on the other hand, the professionalized, disciplinary account of nursing, with its consequent impersonalization and generalization of the nursing subject. We have seen how these conflicts work within the texts examined earlier, producing at one moment highly valued, if dicey, texts in the impersonalized disciplinary voice (Sadie and Lorraine's). Other similarly nahed 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 Dorothy's) appear to fall 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 thematise the conflict with more overtly the experiential/practice-based account and the impersonalized disciplined account of nursing. While appearing somewhat unconventional, i.e. not dicey, 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 uns and others (see Hall and Simpson 1995) on 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 Stever, Chapter 11). Here they may vary specifically on to the shift of nursing into the academy with its consequent professionalization and disciplinarianism. This would suggest that the disciplinary politics of nursing is not at all limited to nursing alone, in that it draws on issues that are clearly broader than nursing such as the positivist/critical hermeneutic divides as well as theory-practice divides.

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

Conclusion: intrinsic and embodied readings

An underlying theme of this chapter has been, in a sense, how lecturers/markers read student writing and how students read the circumstances within which they are required to write. Here I take 'reading' in a broader pedagogical sense: how we read these texts as people concerned with the teaching of academic writing. I want to suggest that there are two broad ways of 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 in, for example, incorporating wordings and meanings into text. They will be a greater or lesser extent have available to them the linguistic technologies to do so. An embodied reading is one that reads the text as an embodiment of the disciplinary politics within which it is produced, and as an embodiment of the process 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 those 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 backdrop of numerous changes in higher education in the UK and increasing numbers of non-traditional entrants, this research has been concerned with a referent institutional approach to student writing, rather than a policy focusing ‘problems’ with individual students. One of the main purposes of the research has been to move away from a skills-based, deficit model of student writing and to consider the complete context 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 ‘strategic’ approaches to learning (Marton et al. 1997). The sources of this perspective lie in social psychology, in anthropology and in constructivism and education. Although more sensitive both to the student as learner and to the cultural context, the approach could nonetheless be criticized on a number of grounds. It appears to assume that the academy is a relatively homogeneous culture, where norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution. Even though at some level discipline and departmental difference may be acknowledged, institutional practices, including processes of change and the exercise of power, do not seem to be sufficiently theorized. Similarly, despite the fact that contextual factors in student writing are recognized as important (Hounsell and Wellman 1980; Taylor et al. 1988), this approach tends to treat writing as a transparent medium of representation and so fails to address the deep language, literary, and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning.

The third approach, the one most closely allied to the ‘new literacy studies’, refers to academic literacies. This approach sees literacies as social practices, in the way we have suggested above. We view student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities rather than skills or socialization. An academic literacies approach views the institutions in which academic practices take place as constituted in, and as sites of, discourse and power. It sees the literacy demands of the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines. From the student point of view the dominant feature of academic literacy is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes. This emphasis on identities and social meanings is the reason to deep affinities and ideological conflicts in each switching and use of the linguistic repertoire. A student’s personal identity — who am I? — may be challenged by the forms of writing required in different disciplines, notable presences about the use of improvised and passive forms as opposed to first-person and active forms, and students may feel threatened and resistant — this isn’t me’ (Lea 1995; Bam 1998). The recognition of this level of engagement with student writing, as opposed to a straightforward study skills and academic socialization approaches, comes from the social and ideological orientation of the new literacy studies. Allied to this work is critical discourse analysis, semiotic functional linguistics and cultural anthropology, which see the student as an active and powerful participant in the construction of social meanings and identities.

From the academic socialization perspective the focus of the tutor/teacher is to inculcate students into a new ‘career’, that of the academic professional. The focus is on student orientation to learning and interpretation of learning tasks, through conceptualization for instance of a distinction between ‘deep’ and ‘surface’
The research

During 1995-96 we carried out research at two universities, one new and one traditional, in south-east England. Ten interviews were conducted with students in one university and twenty-six students were interviewed, either individually or in small groups. At the new university, 25 members of academic staff and 25 students were interviewed in the same way. The interviews at both institutions included the director of academic 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 such research could warrant. However, we did adopt an 'ethnographic-style' approach (Green and Boole 1997) to the research which included conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff and students, participatory observation of group sessions and attendance at samples of students' writing, written feedback on students' work and handouts on 'essay writing'. A major part of the research has included a linguistically based analysis of the textual material. As the research progressed we realised that this was an equally important source of data which we needed to consider alongside our interviews with students. This research allowed us to benefit from our own situated knowledge of the institutional settings within which we were researching. Adapting an ethnographic-style approach to the research, within settings of which we already had prior knowledge, enabled us to move away from the focus on transcribed interview material to a more eclectic approach, merging the understanding of both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations of university writing.

Our research, then, was not based on a representative sample from which generalisations in a traditional sense (e.g. demographics or within 'fields of study') could be drawn but was rather conceived as providing case studies that enabled us to explore theoretical issues and generate further research questions and systematic studies in the approach, therefore, was an ethnographic tradition described by Mitchell (1984). Rather than applying 'empirical derivation', as in much social science, there are one-dimensional means to generalizing, and for establishing the 'representativeness' of social data. Mitchell provocatively asks what he terms 'analytical induction'.

What the anthropologist using a case study to support an argument does is to show how general principles deriving from some theoretical orientation manifest themselves in some given set of particular circumstances. A good case study, therefore, enables the analyst to establish theoretical and methodological connections between events and phenomena which previously were intractable. (Mitchell 1984: 199)

In the present context, the tutors 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 generalisations can be drawn regarding the whole of English higher education, these case studies can point to important theoretical propositions and connections that might otherwise be raised. The data, for instance, enable us to explore the hypothesis that, viewed as 'academic literacies', the beliefs and practices of tutors and students constitute a different kind of evidence than if the same data were viewed in terms of skills or academic socialization. These accounts can, for instance, provide evidence for differences between staff and students' understanding of the writing process at levels of epistemology, authority and contestation over knowledge rather than at the level of technical skill, surface linguistic competence or cultural assimilation. We have therefore approached our research data in order to acquire insights and conceptual elaboration on our three models of student writing and to generate from them analytic induction rather than 'enumerative induction'.

The unstructured, in-depth interviews examined how students understood the different literacy practices which they experience in their studies and in what ways academic staff understood the literacy requirements of their own subject area and make these explicit to their students. We gave participants the opportunity to reflect upon the writing practices of the university, at different levels and in different disciplines, to consider what influences were being brought to bear upon them not only in practice but also in their understanding and to consider what reading materials they were exposed to or use and the writing requirements of their own discipline and the general writing demands of the institution.

In both cases, our research was to contribute to deepening the institutional understanding of academic literacy practices in higher education, and we therefore began the project with a focus upon those traditional categories: humanities; social sciences; and natural sciences. In both universities we carried on interviewing with academic staff within these categories and then went on to interview students. Early in the research it became clear from the interview data we were collecting that the traditional boundaries that we had identified to frame the research agenda in the sense relevant, particularly for students. Our interviews with students alerted us to the fact that old disciplinary divides were of less relevance in comparative work on the interpretate as research categories.

The diverse nature of the degree programmes at preliminary level resulted in students engaging in what we termed 'course writing' which, we suggest, can be paralleled with linguistic code switching (Gumperz 1982). Such switching may occur within traditional academic disciplines in a traditionally specific way (e.g., anthropology) or within 'fields of study' such as modular programmes or interdisciplinary courses (Asian studies, business studies, etc.) or to specific modules or course units within programmes (twentieth-century women's literature, operations management). In doing so, they are using to interpret the writing requirements of different levels of academic activity. Such switching may also encompass the different demands of different subject tutors and their personal interpretations of writing requirements. As students switch between such disciplines, course units, modules and tutors, different assumptions about the nature of writing, related to different epistemological presuppositions about the nature of academic knowledge and learning, are being brought to bear, often implicitly, on the writing they are required to produce. Evidence from interviews with tutors and students and from handouts prepared for students on 'good practice' writing suggests that it is frequently very difficult for students to 'read off' from one context what might be the specific academic expectations in another. Nor, as some tutors noted, does the provision of general assessments about the nature of academic writing help students to make sense 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 the 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 fairly consistent views regarding what constitutes a good piece of student writing in the areas in which they teach. These tend to reflect the different more generic setting of examination, assessment and layout and to such apparently evident components of national exam writing 'structure', 'immediacy', or 'representativeness'. Their own disciplinary histories had a clear influence on staff conceptualisations and representations of what were the main elements to look for in student writing at both levels, although the epistemological and methodological issues that underlay these were often expressed through the surface features and superficial aspects of 'writing' in itself, see below. It was this confusion, we argue, that led to difficulties for students not yet acquitted with the disciplinary underpinnings of faculty feedback. This confusion was compounded by the move towards multidisciplinary courses at degree level and the modular system that was fully in place at one of the universities. As a result, although faculty understanding of student writing was often described in disciplinary terms, for example, 'in history the discipline is particularly important', or 'in English we are looking for clarity of expression', in practice staff were often not at all sure about the best kind of writing that should be expected, that is to say, the staff generally had a clear belief in these concepts as crucial to their understanding of what constitutes a successful piece of writing, there was less certainty when it came to describing what underlay a well-argued or well-structured piece of student work. More commonly, they were able to identify when a student had been successful, but could not describe how a particular piece of writing 'looked', 'worked'. We suggest that, in practice, what makes a piece of student writing 'appropriate' has more to do with issues of epistemology than with the surface features of form to which staff often have recourse when describing what constitutes good writing. That is to say, underlying, often disciplinary, assumptions about the nature of knowledge affected the criteria given to the term 'writing' and 'argument'. Since these assumptions vary with context, it is not valid to suggest that such concepts are generally and irrespective of context (common somewhat vague) of 'knowing' (Fitzgerald 1992), as the reference to 'writing problems' frequently implied in what the students found confusing and had considerable implications for current attempts to define generic skills.

The research data, then, suggest that, while academic staff can describe what constitutes successful writing, difficulties arose when they attempted to make explicit what a well-developed argument looks like in a written assignment. At the level of form, one tutor is able to explain clearly what he means...
I need my students to have an introduction which, as the scene and a main body which covers a number of issues highlighted in the introduction and introduces economic theory, application and analysis. Students need to be critical, to evaluate, to try and reach some sort of solutions and then to write something concise and conclude. You need a good solid introduction leading into your main body, and each part of your essay needs to be well thought out and link with the text. It will show a professional feel about it and not describe but will critically analyze, and then it will lead into a summary and conclusion.

However, the description of such 'useful', 'evaluative', 'analytical', etc. - could not be explained further. As another learner put it: I know a good essay when I see it but I cannot describe how to write it.

The lends credence to the idea that elements and 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 learner 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 reflect the world (Baker and Hall 1995). These practices, then, are integrally related to the ways in which staff communicate their meanings and expectations about what constitutes a 'good' 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 they believe to be like familiar descriptive categories such as 'structure and argument', 'clarity and coherence', 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 perspective, but they may be 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 exemplifies this in some detail.

Writing requirements: student interactions

The research interviews with students revealed a number of different interactions 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 was unsuccessful and met with negative feedback. Students were consciously aware of matching between diverse writing requirements and knew that their task was to unpack what kind of writing any particular assignment might require. This was at a more complex level than before, such as the 'essay' or 'report', bringing more deeply to writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting.

of a traditional essay, while other nurses commented 'I don't 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 discipline, individual nurses had different opinions about when or if it was appropriate to use this. Such conventions were often presented as self-evidently correct in ways 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 extract who came unstuck when she wrote a history essay drawing on just one written source as she regularly and successfully had done in English. Similarly, a BTEC extract to the traditional university had worked in industry for five years and was used to extensive academic report writing, but, while in touch with a traditional academic text as part of a course in public administration and management, he had no idea how to go about writing an essay.

Students took different approaches to the course which they experienced. Some saw it as a kind of game, trying to work out the rules, not only for a field of study, a particular course or particular assignment, but also for an institution as an individual. They adopted writing strategies that masked their own opinions, in a sense mimicking simplistic or explicit expectations that were, for instance: the historical historian 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 learnt how to balance one recognizes author against another as a way to present their own personal viewpoint in their writing. On the other hand, a mature student writing social policy felt overly 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 procedures and their implication of the rules of the game, which seemed to require him simply to juxtapose data from different sources and to eschew personal knowledge.

Relations around student writing: interpreting feedback

So far, we have attempted to outline some of the implications in the research data concerning the existing variety in the different interpretations and understandings of student writing encountered. These variations exist within and across courses, subjects and disciplines - and between students and academic tutors in many different contexts. They are contextualized both in the particular form of the text - the nature and assignement 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 constructed and emergent literary practice integral to text construction. Central to our understanding of both the varieties of academic literary practices which students engage in across the university and the relations which exist around text production is an examination of the ways in which written feedback is interpreted by the students. As we have illustrated, the research has been concerned with a textual examination of tutor written feedback on student work - both on standard feedback sheets and in the margins of assignments - and with students' interpretations of the meanings that they attach to this feedback both in general and in 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, increasingly, perceived as 'commerial' ways of knowing? We have already illustrated a feedback genre within which the use of descriptive categories - such as 'structure' and 'argument' - may embed contrasting conceptual understandings. As we have suggested, such terms tend, therefore, to be neither elastic, particularly in academic contexts, nor may be more useful understood in their gestaltking role or at a more complex idealevel within an institutional hierarchy than the unproblematic generic requirements of student writing.

One useful way of examining the relationships around texts may, then, be to start by examining the feedback strategy staff give to students. By examining some of the genres of students' written work and the genres of staff feedback on it we may be able to make more sense of 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 analysing feedback, but frequently such assumptions remains 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 Kees, Chapter 6) but in a further discussion of modality. Tutors frequently form the type 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: 'Explain what the concept of 'Linkage'?'. Too many unlinked facts here. Can’t see your argument.' This categorical modality is also expressed here and frequently in the essays we have seen by means of orthographic marks such as '!', '?' or ("..."), indicating disagreement, doubt, criticism. The '?' frequently indicates not a genuine question which tutor and student are engaged in explicating, but rather is used in a kind of exklusive, or as a categorical assertion that the point is not 'correct'. In the essay in question there are seven sentence question marks, many with this function, and its bracket signs ("...") indicating links that should have been made, in the space of 35 pages. One
has only to imagine other kinds of modality that could be expressed in this context to recognize the conventional and categorical nature of the usage mitigated commas such as 'you might like to consider,' have been thought about, in my opinion, and open-ended questions such as 'could this be interpreted differently?' Is there a link with other comments here? etc. would evoke a different modality (more provisional or mitigated), create a different genre and evoke a different interpersonal relationship between student as writer and tutor as reader than that indicated by the comments we describe here. In these the tutor clearly and firmly takes authority, assuming the right to criticize directly and categorically on the basis of an assumed 'correct' view of what should have been written and how. Students, however, may have a different interpretation of feedback comments. The anthropology student in question could not make sense of the feedback comment 'Meaning' on his test. For him, the meaning of what he was asuming and the development of the argument in his own text were clear. Even where students indicate in interviews that they did not understand the comments, thinking it unfair or even disagreed with it, few if any challenge the tutor's right to make such comments. It appears, then, that written feedback on students' work is not merely an attempt at communication or at learning a discipline or at socialization into a community - although it clearly has elements of all of these - but is also embedded in relationships of authority as a marker of difference and a maintenance of boundaries.

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

The problem with the modular system is that every piece of work they have to do is to be marked as part of the module. It is not until they are well into the second module that they get the results from the first. Effectively there is no feedback.

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

Future directions
Our research, then, indicates the variety in both the writing practices that students engage with as part of their university courses and the complex nature of the feedback they receive from tutors. These writing practices and genres are not simply concerned with technical matters in which 'appropriate' skills are acquired and tests become members of an expert community, as in the first two models described above (see Figure 2). 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 written work and in the social and institutional relationships associated with it.

During the course of the research we have identified three thematic categories originating from both students and staff as ways of looking at students' writing. The first is focused on the student and suggests that students lack a set of basic skills that can be dealt with, primarily in a remedial study skills or learning support unit. This takes no account of the interaction of the student with institutional practices and is based on the assumption 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 of skills in becoming an academic writer. The third theme is that 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 '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 conceptualised their own and their students' writing practices, makes a broader theoretical and critical understanding of the 'problems' being identified in student writing. Without such a perspective,

3
What Am I Supposed to Make of This?
The Messages Conveyed to Students by Tutors' Written Comments

Raz Iované, Romy Clark and Rachel Rimmershall

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

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

There are four matters to focus on in the arena of 'grade': to write a number to evaluate the work on a given scale. The four English for academic purposes (EAP) tutors whose work we report to, some work in the UK university, others in the African university. The circumstances in which they work (rather than the differences between their institutions) are to some extent responsible for their ways of responding to students' writing. Two of the EAP tutors (A and B) teach compulsory communications skills classes in which the assessment counts towards the students' final degree. In this respect these two EAP tutors are rather like
Subject tutors, except that they must assess the writing in terms of its success as communication, rather than in terms of what it communicates. Tutor C’s situation is similar, in that her course is assessed and graded. The difference is that she uses the ‘process approach’ to the teaching of writing, which involves a lot of dealing, discussion and redrafting towards the production of final versions of writing. She sets students academic tasks such as argumentative essays, critical reviews and research papers on ‘general domain’ topics such as AIDS and pollution. Tutor D, 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 as part of their coursework. This provision is not compulsory, but available to any student wishing 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;
- the possible messages students may receive from different types of response;
- implications for subject staff development and for EAP provision.

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

Different styles of response

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

The tutors’ circumstances, values, beliefs and working practices become particularly interesting when we consider the relationship between specific textual comments and general comments, and how the comments were written. Tutors’ writing is not a separate sheet. The sheet printed on the right of the comment indicates that there is a need to be involved with the writing, while the comments are written on a separate sheet. EAP tutor B’s style is, perhaps, typical of the uncertainty or insecurity on the part of many tutors. What is more, exactly, the status or function of their comments is. EAP tutors C and D, by contrast, are writing with a very clear view of what they are doing and why. They share the ‘staring, not alter’ philosophy associated with the ‘process approach’ to the teaching of writing (see Freedman 1980 for reading students’ writing and Clark and Inkelas 1997, Chapter 4, for discussion of issues associated with this approach). This means that the main purpose of the response is to help students improve their work, which they will re-submit after the tutor has seen them. For EAP tutor C, there is no reason to expect the students to learn, as we mentioned when discussing subject tutors D and E, because this text is not graded. The response is part of an ongoing collaboration between tutor and student to produce a good end product. For EAP tutor B, the students have a number of responses to specific details of comments in the text, rather than corrections of its form. This focus on meaning reflects EAP tutor B’s belief that coherence is a crucial aspect of academic writing, and that this depends on meaning, not form.

Both subject tutor E and EAP tutor D write their responses with the express intention of discussing them in a one-to-one tutorial with the student writer. By writing students to discuss their responses, these tutors are giving the message that they do not have the last word on what the student writer: their comments are not final, but part of a dialogue. The choice of writing impliment is interesting, too. In our sample, these include pencil, black biro, green pen, red pen and word processor. It may be appropriate to suggest that these choices make a difference, but some students have said to us in private that they are not. Anything written in pencil suggests tentative: it can be discussed, rubbed out, altered. It also suggests that, even collaboratively, tutor and student: the pencil marks are there to help the student rather than to put them in their place, at the other extreme is the red pen. This is conventionally the symbol of teachers’ reserve knowledge and their right to make unchallengeable judgments. The black biro represents, perhaps, the least difference between the tutor and the student: they are using the same writing implements: they are on equal terms in a joint project. The word processor is a new form of technology to use for responding to students’ writing. By using a word processor, subject tutor E shows both consideration for her students and how important she thinks it is for them to read their 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 unchangeable: then do not have the personal, provisional quality of the pencil-and-rubber technology.

The nature and purpose of responses

In this section we show how responses can serve many different functions, both intentionally and unintentionally. We analyse the actual nature and wording of selected comments to subject tutors B, C, D and E, and by EAP tutors B and D, reproduced on the following pages. You may like to read these before moving on to our analysis. We are 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 essays.

SUBJECT TUTOR C

General Comment
(1) This is a very satisfactory essay.
(2) However, your arguments are undermined by the use of the personal pronoun.
(3) . . . is not an established authority – or not yet, anyway.
(4) Avoid the use of personal nouns and expressions like ‘in my view’ in all academic work.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

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 lines in black biro at the end of the essay, plus good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor C</td>
<td>An occasional tick in the margins in red biro</td>
<td>Six free lines in red biro 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 20 lines at the beginning of the word-processed notes, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutor E</td>
<td>24 numbers on the text in pencil, with word-processed notes in pencil on a separate sheet, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
<td>‘Fair’ at end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor B</td>
<td>Correction marks, underlining, arrows, short comments, written directly on the student’s text in red pen</td>
<td>Exclusively positive comments and suggestions in green pen in the margins of the text and on the top and bottom of the page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor C</td>
<td>Communication Skills Course</td>
<td>About half a page of positive comments and suggestions for development at the end of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor D</td>
<td>Academic Support Programme</td>
<td>Up to 50 numbers on the text in pencil, with marking numbered notes, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutor E</td>
<td>None</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 rarer of cases, subject tutors are looking at a final product of the writing process, and are rating it with the primary aim of grading. This may explain the fact that, on the whole, subject tutors seem to focus more on general comments. All of them put a grade at the end, and all except subject tutor E 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 summative process. Subject tutors D and E, by contrast, provide a large quantity of numbered responses to the text itself – so many, in fact, that they are written on a separate sheet. The quantity and specificity of these comments on the text indicates that these tutors believe that they should be engaging with what the students have written, as well as assessing it. The fact that the comments are written on a separate sheet is significant, too. One reason for using a separate sheet is to ensure that the comments are as legible as possible – they are very obviously intended to be read. They have the status of a separate document: a message specifically from the tutor to the student about their work, rather than ‘marking’ in the sense of ‘putting marks on’ – deducting? – what the students have written. We suggest that the separate document is more respectful to the students’ writing than comments written directly on it.

The four EAP tutors vary mainly in the balance between general and specific comments, and in the place of these comments. EAP tutor B’s style is, perhaps, typical of the uncertainty or insecurity on the part of many tutors. What is more, exactly, the status or function of their comments is. EAP tutors C and D, by contrast, are writing with a very clear view of what they are doing and why. They share the ‘staring, not alter’ philosophy associated with the ‘process approach’ to the teaching of writing (see Freedman 1980 for reading students’ writing and Clark and Inkelas 1997, Chapter 4, for discussion of issues associated with this approach). This means that the main purpose of the response is to help students improve their work, which they will re-submit after the tutor has seen them. For EAP tutor C, there is no reason to expect the students to learn, as we mentioned when discussing subject tutors D and E, because this text is not graded. The response is part of an ongoing collaboration between tutor and student to produce a good end product; hence the comments and suggestions written in any available space on the text. Tutor C also working with the philosophy of ‘exclusively positive comments’, advocated by some ‘process approach’ theorists and practitioners (see Zakt 1996). Even though EAP tutor D is not himself a subject tutor, she makes an enormous number of responses to specific details of comments in the text, rather than corrections of its form. This focus on meaning reflects EAP tutor B’s belief that coherence is a crucial aspect of academic writing, and that this depends on meaning, not form.

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

The choice of writing implements is interesting, too. In our sample, these include pencil, black biro, green pen, red pen and word processor. It may be appropriate to suggest that these choices make a difference, but some students have said to us in private that they are not. Anything written in pencil suggests tentative: it can be discussed, rubbed out, altered. It also suggests that, even collaboratively, tutor and student: the pencil marks are there to help the student rather than to put them in their place, at the other extreme is the red pen. This is conventionally the
**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' meant! 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 dialect(s)?
(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 "typically" here, but moving with the times.

23. So how can one say the older form had higher "quality"?

24. OK, but it's important to separate this argument from the one about language age.

Teaching grammar does not necessarily improve language use.

25. Important point.

26. You should show how you have used your reading by making references in the text.

27. There are some good points here, but a lot of confusion too. I hope my notes help you to write more clearly.

---

**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 "incorrect sentence".
(5) Puts a tick in the margin.
(6) Writes "who"? above a pronoun.
(7) Puts "ap" to indicate misspellings.
(8) Writes "not clear" in the margin.
(9) Puts a very few lines in the margin.

---

**EAP TUTOR D**

**Specific Comments**

(1) Great comments!
(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) Are concrete examples?
(6) Not sure why you're telling me this here.
(7) Why not T?

---

**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 mention occasions to get into more detail about these measures and I feel that, although your analysis stems from your HTS, some of your proposals are more theoretical than they are practical.

(4) I wanted to know more about how you intend to operationalise your ideas.

(5) I think that you rather unfairly make the teacher 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 recognised but I wonder if you do not somewhat underestimate the role that is put upon the teacher to take the institution and society to build on the learners bring to the classroom in attempting to augment their skills and knowledge.

(8) There are one or two occasions when I find it difficult to follow your logic and sometimes I feel your argument over-relied on an emotional appeal rather than on effective and considered thought.

(9) However, I suppose we all have such feelings and I feel rather charished 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 it's taken me 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 lines that you mention. This seems to me to suggest a 'teachers versus learners' scenario. If your intended readership is ELT personnel in your own country then I wonder if they 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. Correlation of factual content is certainly more prominent in realistic 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**

(8) By whom, where, why, and why?

(9) All your own thoughts?

(10) Do you want to avoid sexist language?

(11) Doesn't this contradict what you said on page 7?

(12) Yes, but you haven't said WHY.

(13) Who are you passing?

(14) Is this the best text here?

**General Comment**

I found this very interesting and learned a lot! With a bit more work – mainly explaining your arguments – this should be fine, as far as (a macro) expert can tell.

We propose that responses fall into the following six categories:

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

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

**Explain the grade in terms of strengths and weaknesses**

This function appears in all the subject tutors' comments, for reasons we have already discussed. Table 3.2 summarises the way in which the subject tutors' comments explain the grade.

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

It is particularly interesting to contrast subject tutor E with all the others in the way they worded their comments. Subject tutor E is the only one who
phrased his comments explicitly as his personal view. He used the words ‘I’ and ‘we’ 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 don’t know what you mean by
I don’t think I personally would
I see

This seems to me to suggest the EAP tutors in our sample do not put a grade on the work to which they are responding. EAP tutor B will, eventually, be required to recommend a grade on the best of this 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 sorts of thing which are particularly the prerogative of subject tutors to judge.

There is, we suggest, a continuum from the sort of academic assignment which clearly asks for a ‘correct’ answer in terms of a grade, to the sort 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 T’s hints 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 T’s response: comments 18 and 24 are telling the student what she should have written on these specific topics, and comment 26 is telling something about how she should have written the essay. Subject tutor E also indicates what would have pleased him more: notice the expressions in his general comments ‘I wanted you . . . ’ to 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 written Therefore maybe there ought to be . . . These all show the student that there was something different she might have written which would have been better in the tutor’s eyes.

The climate seems to be ‘ideal’ signal that there is no ‘ideal’ answer in social science and humanities writing assignments. But a given tutor might have strong views about what to expect in a good assignment, and in such cases students who want a good mark need to put some effort into seeing out how their tutor would answer their own question, what the tutor’s ideas, preferences and ‘obessions’ are (Rimmershaw 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 as well as encouraging the student’s work: perhaps only subject tutor D’s comment 3, and subject tutor E’s comment 4. EAP tutor B, however, is clearly focusing on this function. All except, perhaps, the first comment are corrections. We do not want to suggest that this observation on our sample represents a clear distinction between the aims and purposes of subject and of EAP tutors. It is, in fact, quite common to find subject tutors who see it as their business to edit and correct students’ work as well as justifying grades, but we have not included any in our sample. Similarly, there are many EAP tutors who do not see this as their primary aim when responding to students’ work: EAP tutor D is an example.

Engage in dialogue with the student

Although this sounds as if it should be the major function of tutors’ responses, we have found it to be surprisingly rare. Subject tutor D shows an interest in engaging in debate over content with the student, but it is always reached in terms of a belief or opinion disagreement with what the student has written. Her comments 4, 7, 9, 21, 22 and 25 all engage with the content of what the student has written, but they are full of indications that what she put in the first place was insufficient, controversial or wrong.

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 4 and 5 and 26 – 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 particular place.
5. Decide your position on social language and stick to it.
6. Where you put forward an argument or point of view, say WHY you think this way.
7. If you use a passive, be sure there is a reason.

Give advice on rewriting this essay

All the EAP tutors in our sample are responding to drafts of essays, and the comments of EAP tutors B and D function explicitly as advice on rewriting the essay. By contrast, none of the subject tutors in our sample were responding to drafts of essays, so strictly speaking this category is irrelevant for them. However, subject tutors sometimes respond as if the student were going to rewrite the essay. Subject tutor D’s comments 7 and 19, and subject tutor E’s detailed comment 4 appear to be giving advice on improving this essay, but it was in fact the final version. This kind of advice – very specific, but too late – is very common. Specific advice on one essay can only be useful for writing the next (probably quite different) one if the student is able to generalize from it.

Conclusion

We suggest that tutors’ research papers responding to students who writing has a powerful shaping effect on the nature of their comments. Even though the comments to subject tutor B’s essay are similar in style (as we pointed out earlier), there is a striking contrast in the particular way they are worded. This can be explained, we suggest, by the fact that the subject tutors were not applying the same sets of criteria to justify their grades, whereas the EAP tutor has the more developmental aim of helping the student rewrite her essay.
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 flattered by brief ones. They often complained that they do not receive enough feedback, that what they get is not comprehensive enough, that it is not helpful, not legible, or not timely. Some students talked about feeling ‘valid’ by detailed responses, and they felt elsewhere they had useful feedback, even though it was specific to a particular piece of writing. So, while there will be strong individual differences, it is safe to assume that the majority of students value feedback, and that providing nothing more than grades depairs them of a valuable learning opportunity. Studies by Rudolph and Swales (1988), Cohen and Cazanovs (1996), and Lei (1999) provide further evidence for this discussion.

Students may go to their tutor’s responses seriously, then it matters more what they contain. We will consider here what messages might be conveyed to students by different types of response: messages about themselves, messages about the function of academic essay writing, and messages about the values and beliefs which underpin universities as institutions.

Messages about themselves

The ideology of educational institutions in most countries is that tutors are superior to students, and everything tutors write will inevitably be affected by this power differential. This is a distortion of power. Unless the positive action to challenge this belief (their own and their students’) that they are superior, their comments, like everything else they do, will reproduce and reinforce it. Like all ideologies, this effect works insidiously, below the level of consciousness; not all tutors intend to reinforce their positions of power over students.

As a result of the power differential, whenever the tutors’ intentions, students are likely to read their responses for possible evaluations of themselves.

Messages about university values and beliefs

Styles of response differ in the messages they convey about the values and beliefs which operate within the institution. Tutors’ responses to students’ writings convey the message that values and beliefs are absolute, culturally specific, or functional. Some present conventions as absolute values of the academic community as a whole—comments such as ‘Don’t use “we/us” in academic work’ or present conventions as determined by ‘neutral’ functional considerations—comments such as ‘A new paragraph would be helpful here’. Tutors’ comments convey messages about students’ and tutors’ roles and relationships, about the nature of knowledge, and about academic conventions and standards. As we have shown, different types of response convey different beliefs about the role of a tutor in the academic community, ranging from being a full-fledged member with authority and knowledge-making rights, to being on the margins, merely a member of the community at all. There are also varying messages about the relations of power and status between students and tutors. Comments can foreground the inequality which results from tutors’ roles as assessors, as subject tutors A-D do. Alternatively, they can foreground collaborative aspects of the tutor-student contract, as EAP tutor D’s comments do.

Some responses give the impression that there are right and wrong answers, right and wrong perspectives, right and wrong views—some of which are not always consistent. Some comments are examples of this. Such comments convey a narrow objective of knowledge. The alternative is for tutors to value and encourage reflection on students’ views, and to place their own views in the first person, as subject tutor E and EAP tutor D do. These responding practices represent knowledge as subjective. Comments can reveal beliefs about the relative values of knowledge and wisdom; whether the work of academics is to create and reproduce a body of knowledge and information, or to enable and disclose the wisdom and understanding. Most of the detailed responses in our sample value wisdom and understanding rather than knowledge, with the possible exception of subject tutor D’s. More specifically, comments convey messages about such things as what counts as sufficient justification for a particular point, what counts as an acceptable argument, what counts as an inadequate explanation. These micro-messages are more likely to be discipline-specific, but some may be framed as values of the academic community as a whole.

Not only that, but they are also likely to expect negative evaluations, and to interpret many tutors’ comments to mean ‘What you wrote is inadequate’ and, by extension, ‘You are inadequate’; a concern which can possibly lead to this interpretation therefore have the potential to undermine students’ confidence in their own knowledge and abilities, to sap their confidence, to increase their sense of inferiority. The students interviewed by Turner (1993) revealed how discouraging feedback affected their self-esteem, their confidence and their whole approach to a course.

Ideally, tutors’ comments could help to build students’ sense of membership of the academic community, rather than emphasizing their role on the margins of it, or some, seeming to exclude them from it. Carefully worded responses can encourage students, and give them a sense that what they are writing is valued. Subject tutor E and EAP tutor D both seem to be attempting to do this.

Messages about academic writing

The very fact that tutors grade what students have written conveys messages about what students are writing as an object to be measured, that writing is the only way, or at least an important way, of proving our knowledge, intelligence, and effort, and that some have the sole right and responsibility for assessment. But these are not necessarily characteristics of student writing. Writing can be used for purposes other than assessment, such as to maintain communication among students and tutors; and students can show their capabilities by other means and media. Forms of collaborative assessment can be introduced in which students have roles, rights and responsibilities in the feedback and evaluation process.

Even when writing is being used as a means of assessment, the way tutors respond to it can convey messages about its value and function:

- By giving fairly general feedback, as subject tutor F and EAP tutor A did, tutors give the firm message that writing is no more than an object to be measured. This message can be counteracted by any form of response beyond a grade or evaluation.
- Focusing on form rather than content, as EAP tutor B did, conveys the message that grammatical accuracy and appropriateness in the qualities which matter most in writing. By contrast, focusing on what students have to say, as subject tutors D and E and EAP tutors C and D did, conveys the message that writing is about meaning-making.
- By giving mainly evaluative comments, tutors reinforce the view that students’ academic writing is an imperfect version of professional academic writing. But they are not responding to it in the way they respond to the writing of their professional peers. In contrast, when they respond to questions and contributions to dialogue with the student, tutors construct student writing as part of ongoing communication between people interested in the same issues and questions.

What Am I Supposed to Make of This?

More generally, responses can also convey ideological messages about the extent to which the institution is monolithically authoritarian or open to diversity and change. We suggest that responses which do not admit or encourage alternative conceptions of knowledge and evaluation may have the covert effect of validating orthodoxy. They suggest that the institution is uncritical and unsuitable. By contrast, responses which pose matters of content and form open to question support an ideology of pluralism and the possibility of change.

Some suggestions for improving the feedback process

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

Implications for subject staff development

We are all reluctant to make changes in our work practices unless we can find ‘meaning’ in the changes (Fullan, 1994). Any programme of staff development needs to be sensitive to tutors’ concerns about what their role is in the institution, about their workload, about what students need help with in writing. It needs to address their beliefs (for example, about their role as educators), their values (for example, about what is worth their while to spend time on), and their understandings (for example, about the nature of the writing process) and not just their practices—yet just what they do, but why they believe that they do it in that way. So, for example, it may be that they believe students already know how to write essays, so they would not have gained a place in higher education, workshops could explore tutors’ own experiences of learning to write, and the tutors may have faced the road to academic community membership. If tutors feel under undue 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 what they could do, and at what they could/might do, and at what they could do, at the same time stop doing at all.

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

- Give thought to the quantity, quality and timeliness of feedback—feedback is crucial to student learning, but if it is too late, too voluminous, or too subjective and inaccurate, it can have the opposite effect of the desired one. Feedback can also be used to improve students’ learning, not just their marks.
- Give thought to the quantity, quality and timeliness of feedback—feedback is crucial to student learning, but if it is too late, too voluminous, or too subjective and inaccurate, it can have the opposite effect of the desired one. Feedback can also be used to improve students’ learning, not just their marks.
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 Isıncı 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 on writing as communication by an interested reader without drawing on subject expertise, so EAP tutors could build on this by facilitating peer feedback on student writing. Not only could this approach reduce the time involved in one-to-one work, it would also send messages about community membership and ownership of conventions to students who participate.

EAP tutors need to do a great deal more than just judging students' writing as right or wrong by some mythical criteria of communicative competence. It is important to recognize variety in academic practice; those of us working in this area should be concerned with the actual tasks which students are currently engaged in, and should examine these practices critically, both for ourselves and with our students. EAP tutors might also try to encourage students themselves to demand more, better and more timely feedback. Work with students focusing on how to obtain the kind of feedback they think they need might be an important way of handing some of the choices about feedback back to those who will use it. As one of the undergraduate students referred to earlier put it (in Rimmershaw 1993):

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

Note

1. The ideas in this chapter originated in an activity conducted by Rachel at Lancaster University in which a group of undergraduate students analysed some tutors' comments on a class activity. Rachel then presented some of the ideas and outcomes to the Teaching of Writing Group. James and Sue developed these into a workshop for a colloquium at the Communication-Skills Unit, University of Docecu Saltan. We are grateful to the students involved, other members of the Teaching of Writing Group and colleagues in Docecu for their contributions to the development of these ideas.
Part 2
New Forms of Writing in Specific Course Contexts

4

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

Mary R. Lea

Introduction
Within today’s higher education moves towards teaching 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 has concerned with computer conferencing and student learning (Mason and Kaye 1989; Mason 1995; O’Connell 1994), it appears that very little is known, as yet, about the nature of these written texts from a linguistic perspective and, more particularly, the relationship between students’ use of computer conferencing and their assessed written work. In these new learning domains both students and tutors are having to become familiar with new ways of constructing knowledge through writing. In this chapter I hope to explore the part that this new form of written communication might play in student learning. I do this by examining a number of different conceptual frames to help gain a greater understanding of the relationship between knowledge, language form and the genre conventions involved in learning. I conclude with some implications of exploring these texts for practitioners who are interested in using computer conferencing in their own course design, delivery and assessment.

The research reported upon here is less concerned with the collaborative and social nature of learning than with the part that discourse 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 1996). Other authors in this volume explore the notion that academic literacy practices are central to the construction of academic knowledge (Barcham, Chapter 1; Paech, Chapter 8; McMillan, Chapter 9; 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 in when they are using computer conferencing for learning. In other words, what kind of writing is this, what kinds of relationships between tutors and students are implicated in this writing, and what part is it playing in the process of learning and teaching?

Computer conferencing is being used by academic staff in higher education in a number of different ways. It can be an integral part of course design where the course is actually delivered online, either completely or partially. In this instance students have no choice about whether to contribute to the conference or not. Alternatively, tutors may set up a computer conference to provide a forum where students may discuss both academic and more general matters 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 very much on the nature of the course and whether it is being delivered in a face-to-face or distance situation. Otherwise there are 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.

42. **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 material support is also available. Students have access to their own tutor group conferences, as this includes particular sub-conferences on each written assignment. Students are encouraged to make contributions concerning their course to their tutor's conferences, 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 with a tutor for **A43** and 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.

40. **Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education** is a rather different course to **A43**. 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 course materials and links to other relevant Web sites. Students on this course are expected to make their own contributions in terms of other relevant Web-based course materials. Additionally, as an integral part of the course, students are required to show evidence of their use of conferencing when writing their assignments. The course guide suggests that:

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

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

New forms of text

Goodman and Graff (1996) explore the increasing use and importance of multimodal texts, which, unlike traditional written texts, "use devices from more than one semiotic mode of communication simultaneously". Writing and images, pictures and photographs for example, are brought together in one text, and making sense of the text involves the reader in making sense of, and creating meaning from, all the different parts of the complete text. Goodman and Graff suggest that such texts are becoming increasingly important in global communications. In the two courses being reported upon here, in order to make the most appropriate use of these new learning environments, students have to learn how to negotiate what are useful 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 **A43** by clicking on the appropriate icon -- for example, A43_Lan's conference. Additionally they can enter a number of other general conference areas where they can communicate with students and tutors from other tutor groups -- for example, A43_Equality, 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 rectified).

Figure 4.2 shows the plenary area for **A4302**. It too, has its own designated tutor group 'areas' and a plenary discussion area for general course issues. Students can also contribute to the 'chat' on non course/subject issues. Notice the welcome message from one of the course tutors.

As for the three created spaces that are neutral and arbitrary, merely a place within which written communication can take place between students, or students and tutors. But the organization of the conference in terms of different virtual spaces and rooms has important implications in terms of where knowledge is being constructed, but also what kind of knowledge is participating in the conference as defined. These practices have implications for the kind of knowledge that is evolved and recorded as a conference on a computer screen, and, therefore, reflects knowledge being constructed within the conference. If students feel confident that their contribution is academically valid they will choose to 'post' in the tutor conference. They may then decide whether the contribution is more suitable for a 'space' reserved for messages around written assignments or the general tutor conference. Alternatively they may not feel confident about posting to the tutor conference and post to the national **A43** Equality conference which ensures that their contribution is not directed at their own individual tutor. The interface can, therefore, be used to recreate something akin to the contexts that speakers normally depend upon to make sense of everyday face-to-face conversations. The spaces constructed within the conferencing reflect the different contexts that speakers naturally 'read off' in everyday conversations. 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' work focuses on the 'ethnography of communication'. His analysis is valuable, however, when exploring the different forms of conversational practices at the heart of the practice of conferencing. (Hymes 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; sentence; purpose; channel; normative conference; and the examination of interaction and interpersonal genres. To get a more complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference might play in student learning and to do so in a systematic and professional manner, we need to consider the conference as a communicative event on-line. Hymes is primarily concerned with the social and interpersonal and contextual features of communication. He suggests that an ‘ethnography of communication’ is essential in understanding language use and that we should not separate different elements of language usage for research purposes. It is always important to focus upon the use of language in the complete context.

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

(Hymes 1994: 11)

Following from Hymes, it is therefore important to explore all the different elements of the conference, including interactions not recorded by the written conference messages themselves, we run the risk of mislabeling this record for evidence that such factors crease very complex relationships of power and authority in this and refers to the use of primary email between students or from student to tutor, which is not recorded in the conference history. In this instance, we may regard this use of one-to-one email as a literacy practice that could be explored further in the learning process.

Once we move to regard participation in the conference as a communicative event on-line – evidence of communication within a speech or discourse community – we can begin to examine the ways in which students have to engage with a wide range of different practices – evidence of which is not always recorded – in order to become successful participants in the conference. Research carried out on the two courses entitled English as a skill included both individual telephone interviews at the end of the course and online interviews with students throughout their course about their use of conferencing. This has given a level of interpretation between students’ use of conferencing postings and message boards and, therefore, has enabled a more complete understanding of the different practices that are involved in the communication of academic knowledge. For example, students on all courses report the need to print off conference contributions so that they can highlight and annotate these written texts in ways which feel more familiar to them. Additionally, most do not makeimum use of the conferencing postings but tend to rely more on preparing a contribution off-line, with all that entails in terms of rethinking and editing texts, before the final considered ‘product’ is put up on the conference.

the fact that tutors were acting as facilitators. Not surprisingly, these tutors are responsible for making written assignments, they are still regarded as ‘knowledge brokers’ even if their contributions are, on the face of it, not valued as highly by their fellow participants.

Work on written academic genres by Berkholz and Huisken (1995) suggests that written academic genres are complex relationships of power and authority between a number of students and a number of teachers. These are far from static but remain shifting and variable in time. Using conferencing provides students with opportunities to express a particular interpretation of their thoughts. They seem to be suggesting that it is the conference genre in which we can see the breaking down of more traditional relationships between students and tutors. Evidence from the conferences on the written texts of students and tutors in the course for which I worked here suggest that there are more opportunities, if they exist, not to reside in the more homogenous conference genre. Therefore, if we were to develop the conference genre in which we could see a result of the relationship between the academic content and the course and the ways in which the technology is being used in a particular way. In other words, it is not the use of conferencing itself which enables students to develop the internally persuasive discourse that Cooper and Selle have to be the most important factor in this. Equally important is the fact that we are beginning to understand the complex relationship between the tutor and the student and the students themselves and what is achieved by both those students and tutors.

The tutor often makes a definitive comment on a topic under discussion or ‘sets the record straight’ if students appear to have misunderstood a point or have made a problematic concept.

I think what Jean is saying is that Bourdieu’s principle of equal prospects for equal advantages contradicts his different principle. The latter says we should do whatever makes things best for the world at large. But doing that might not be in some circumstances, involves not doing something to equalize prospects at all. In other words, his equal opportunity principle might rule out what his difference principle requires. So, either in such a situation, he does what the difference principle requires, and breaks the equality of opportunity principle (this is the principle in the study of women called ‘The arguments supporting...’ or he may be fair because it could be for understanding the importance of for those students to be self-reflective learners working directly with their peers.

Sure, you might be the only one in the room who is a member of the activity. The students at worst are not the one person who is a member of the activity.

In contrast, in BSEM the act of facilitating and their presence on the conference is much less apparent. Conference contributions encourage the students to be self-reflective learners working directly with their peers.

Because the conference structure is designed to be student-driven, the written genres of the conference appear to reflect the academic content of the course: an innovative conference about and learning that which in some senses challenges traditional academic concerns.

I am assuming here a similar methodological stance to precise work on academic literacy and academic written genres as evidenced in this volume (Pratt et al., Chapter 3; Steele, Chapter 11) and, therefore, make distinctions not merely between academic but between the different written genres within which conferencing is being used for learning by students and tutors, and the different practices that are associated with these genres. Different conference genres reflect the different forms of knowledge being taken up by tutors and students within the different conference.

Students are making use of these learning environments in their own ways, resulting in specific conferences that reflect the different forms of knowledge being taken up by tutors and students within the different conference.

The last sentence says ‘in such circumstances, arranging for equal prospects would make things worse for the well off than they would otherwise be, and could only be justified on grounds of desert which Rawls wants to exclude from determining the allocation of resources.’

Does this help make the point clearer?

In contrast, in BSEM the act of facilitating and their presence on the conference is much less apparent. Conference contributions encourage the students to be self-reflective learners working directly with their peers.
Epistemic modality and conference contributions

In order to explore the ways in which students negotiate academic knowledge through enacting in the conference, I will use here the concept of ‘modality’ as a tool with which we can begin to examine the ways in which students position themselves in relation to knowledge in the conference. Modality is a term used by social linguists to indicate a speaker’s attitude towards a proposition. Focus is often placed upon the use of modal auxiliaries such as ‘must’, ‘may’, ‘could’, ‘should’ and ‘need’ in order to indicate a speaker’s attitude towards what they are saying. The use of modal auxiliaries indicates the speaker’s confidence in the truth of what is being said. I have found Jennifer Coates’ discussion of ‘modality’ in and of conference contributions. Coates (1997) makes the point that it is not just the use of modal auxiliaries that are significant in this context, but more in that, when we hear a speaker’s use of modality, it indicates the speaker’s confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. Although her own analysis is concerned with written speech, I have previously suggested that this work also indicates the kinds of debate taking place and, additionally, how these debates are related to the reader of the essay, the tutor (Kram 1992). In this paper, Coates’ work also helps us to understand more about the nature of conferences.

Although on both courses students reported how much they had enjoyed contributing to the conferences, they expressed some disappointment with regard to the kinds of debate taking place and, additionally, how these debates were related to the reader of the essay, the tutor. In Coates’ view, students were concerned about the levels of academic debate taking place in the tutor conferences. As one student put it: I want more than a discussion I can get down the job!

They were therefore concerned that conference interactions were not focused on academic knowledge. Additionally, they were looking for more opportunities to get them on the right track. They found it difficult to value the contributions made by other students.

This student uses a number of linguistic devices which indicate his uncertainty about committing himself to a particular version of academic content, or, put another way, to the truth of a proposition. This retains a conventional approach may, of course, also be reflecting the difficulty of philosophers. This indicates how difficult it is in practice to separate epistemology from students’ understanding of academic content.

The student begins the message by aligning his views with those of an early conference. He then goes on to say ‘There seem to me’ and ‘I believe’, as if he were doing, neither being strongly committed statements and the latter again relating his ideas to those of others. He then completes his lines with a number of questions. The use of these devices seems to indicate both his own personal exploration of philosophical knowledge and, at the same time, the necessity to first his interpretation to that of the other students. In Coates’ terms he is expressing doubt about his commitment to the truth of what he says, while at the same time he is being open to being challenged by others. For example, the student who is the tourist for the conference is able to say that he has not made a decision about this, that he is not sure that he has reached a conclusion at which he is ready to commit himself to this decision. When the student comments that he has not yet made a decision about this, that he is not sure that he has reached a conclusion at which he is ready to commit himself to this decision.
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 the 'collaborative learning' as an academic concept but it also feels as if it is more a game giving her the space to contribute with a stronger commitment in what she is saying. This appears to contrast with the previous student's experience of being 'arbitrary'. Of course, on H802 students are not necessarily learning about collaborative learning; it is exactly what they are doing. They are not having to make distinctions in their conference writing between academic content and 'using the conference', as is the case in courses with more traditional academic content, such as A2E3.

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 expected 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 A2E3 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 entailed particular relationships between both tutors and students and students and students. Additionally, I have indicated an area 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. For H802, assessment tasks are presented in familiar ways. Despite the fact that students are encouraged to make reference to conference messages in their written work, the assignment questions are still prescribed by a traditional essay genre.

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

likely to mean a very different form of assessment altogether - for example, students keeping their own reflexion log (see Cynon, Chapter 14).

• Recognizing 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 'teach' does little to alter this situation.

Exploring some of the more obvious verbal features of students con-
tributions 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 texts, of the kind that there are, for example, between traditional print-based material and as-
sembled written text. In each circumstance, students often report looking to the printed text to give them clues about how to approach their own writing (Lea, 1998). In contrast, in the conference there are few of the familiar marks of authority that students are looking for - for example, the referenced author to give validity to the text. This may, in part, account for why students on the philosophy course were looking for the authority of the tutor contributions. It appears that although the conferencing course fosters 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 presented by students as a record of academic content in the way that they generally regarded 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 but we need to be able to make explicit the connections between the different academic literacy practices associated, on the one hand, with 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-
selves what we are assessing. It may not be easy to encourage students to engage with the academic 'content' of the conferences; we need to focus more specifically on developing students' literacy skills in terms of their own learning, which must include a reflexive approach to academic content. There will, of course, sites such as H802 where it is more difficult to make a distinction between content and the process of reflexivity. In courses such as these, therefore, probably going to be easier to develop such linkages. In others, such as A2E3, where the academic content is more clearly delineated, we need to explore further the ways in which features

Discuss the following quotation from Ivan Illich (1971):

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

Students reported that there was an artificiality about writing conference messages into assessed writing. This might result from the fact that students are being asked to make connections between too very different written genres - writing on the conference and writing for assessment - the only linkage benges them to be trying to merge one into another. Since the more familiar way of approaching such a question would be the reference to established authors, this may arguably have made it even more difficult for students to incorporate conference views into their assessed work. There seem, then, to be no obvious connections between the new genres being explored and developed in the conferences and the old written genres being replicated in the assessment processes. In order to address the nutrition that students may be making inadequate use of conferencing in their learning and ultimately in their writing for assessment, maybe as tutors we need to concentrate on 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 is being explored in the conference? What assumptions are tutors making about teaching and learning the course?

• Understanding the nature of the contributions that students make to the conferences and how these embed particular commitments to and understandings of academic knowledge. As tutors, recognizing the impor-
tance of these and building upon students' understandings in their learning. This may or may not mean replicating the features of more traditional face-to-face tutorials, depending on the particular academic context.

• Be clear in what design and organization of environment the conference is or attempts to replicate or substitute for. We need to think carefully about the ways in which they can make connections between the conferences and their assessed work. This may mean more than asking students to evidence con-
ference contributions in written assignment. It is more
Making Making, 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. We therefore have no evidence and no label that they "let their hands do the thinking." They invest through the experience of moving in space, in time, in particular movements, in particular spaces, into that space, to that idea, to music, and to other dancers within that space; the documentation of those intentions registers their experience. While dance students in an university writing course are confident about their own practice, with its starting point of physical movement (and its accompanying growth of spatial awareness, sensitivity to physical relationships, concentration, teamwork and an experimental approach), they are often uncertain about the formal writing tasks they encounter. The aim of this chapter is to explore the tensions and relations between the physical, the 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 chapter addresses some of the ways in which dance work is both utilitarian 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 attitudinal factors which influence student opportunities and student performance.

The study in the School of Dance focused on the kinds of writing that students were required to produce, the attitudes of staff and students and the difficulties encountered. In this chapter we look in particular at the writing required within the context of the choreography course. We want to suggest that the division between writing essays and making dances may not be as great as staff and students often perceive. By looking closely at a typical essay title from the course we offer a socially oriented explanation for the choreography and writing tasks, which draws on Harris's model of personal identity formation. We then describe the way writing functions in higher education to 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 (Coy 1990). This enables us to draw an analogy between writing and choreographing - an analogy which is then, in the latter part of the chapter, illustrated in practical work undertaken with students. The chapter ends with students' reflection on this work and with our own attempts to see the implications for improving writing support for students.

Writing in choreography

The small-scale study conducted in the university School of Dance looked at the experiences of second-year students taking core courses in critical studies and choreography for both of which an essay was required. For dance students, the writing task was linked with some of the work of choreography - it was not unusual to regard the essay as a distraction, an almost alien, to the intense creative and practical work which undergraduate students were undertaking. In critical studies, however, where students learnt 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.

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

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

I mean when I started 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 in to all 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.

It is one conclusion that this chapter that the distinction between choreography and writing is as much to do with perception of the differences as with actual radical disjunction between the two. There is, for example, a certain irony in the novice's reaction to giving stylistic and structural advice for writing; when she is helping students to make a dance, it is particularly considerations of style and structure that she brings to their attention. Whereas choreography is conceived as a process of realizing and transforming ideas through the medium of dance, the preference for writing is as a kind of commentary, giving (reporting) an idea of 'how they felt' and not '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', 'have a good introduction, conclusion...'.

Such advice only serves to help her students understand what making an essay involves; other more elusive regulatives go unspoken. The essay titles she was asked to respond to in choreography provide clues - though no more than clues - as embodied academic rules and rationales. These titles had been set by the choreographer more than by her predecessor, and in each case they asked us to consider their own work in relation to the work of others. The title that most of our sample chose was: 'Describe and discuss how you use particular movement vocabulary and movement quality to realise your dance idea. How did you choose and develop your dance language and how best did you set your source idea? Illustrate your answer to this question from known works.'

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

I think I captured more of what the dance was about. But because I had to write about two other pieces as well, I think that's quite confusing on my dance. This is my dance, and now I'm talking about two other completely different pieces. So you don't have to do with my work. They didn't have any ideas from them, I didn't use their themes or anything. I felt it detached from my idea. It felt as though it was three pieces in the end.

How to be new; how to be you

A more social perception of making dance begins to make sense of the essay task. We read in asking the student to make a one per hour dance as a successful realization of a dance as a "enough of the dance as it is", which means it has to be uniquely hers, not a copy, but also to be recognizable, part of the collective 'way of doing' that constitutes the disciplines and traditions of dance. Hence she is asked to refer not only to her own dance but to the work of other choreographers. Making a claim for 'originality' as a particular feature of much academic writing (Kinder and Glinzer 1989), but it is also a way of explaining what is seen on the making of a dance. Both activities can be challenged through the notion of a 'personal identity project' (Harris 1989; see also Ren & Ren 1991; 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 in a clockwise direction by four types of operation: appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalization (see Figure 3.1).

In terms of making a dance, the dance student appropriates from the public/collection of worlds, knowledge and skills which feed her personal making (transformation) of a dance piece. So, for instance, another of the students in our study, Lisa, described how her increasing knowledge of dance and choreographers liberates her to make dance:

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It makes you braver, I suppose... to be just you, which is a difficult thing to do. You'd think it'd be easy, wouldn't you? Just being yourself. But it's...
Legitimating through writing

So much for the personal identity project of making a dance and becoming a choreographer; within the higher education context, publication and conceptualization processes are only partly achieved through making in the act itself. Over and above this, the writing of an essay functions to legitimise 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 universality of something in reverse (i.e., a common attribution, a philosophical idea, a dance), where ‘universality’ is understood, in Harris’s model, as representing, not ‘the broad’ or ‘most of the’ (cf. traditions and Gender 1988–90), but as deriving from orientation to, and distinctiveness from, some established knowledge, source of meaning, or authority. Gender notes that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalised source) and transparency (exploitation of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing: what Olson (1977) refers to as the ‘essayist technique’ (gender and Gender 1985–95) comment that in Western academic contexts ‘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 (in which this case is the choreography). It

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

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

Exploring correspondences between writing and choreographing

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

The module involved students in exercises that focused on organization 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 led to think about ordering in categories, sequences and hierarchies and in patterns that revealed the relationships of parts to a whole. On one occasion the 70 students in the group were asked to arrange theodorum accords according to the colour of clothes they were wearing. Where white tops were sequenced in terms of coverage and elaboration – sleeveless, with short sleeves, with long sleeves, with low and collars – elements that did not fit in the overall sequence of color ‘paragraphs’ had to be redefined. An early draft for a dance sequence between ‘paragraphs’: multiplied points incorporating all the colour ideas were ‘conclusions’.

The students began, first, more top, attempting to relate 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 the formal

publicities, in explicit verbal form, its nesses, or, in Harre’s terms, its potential for conventionalization into the public/collective realm.

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

This piece [Alley’s To Bed with Love] is similar in structure to the second section of How Come the Sun. Alley’s dancers begin the piece by entering gradually on one side with their focus in the horizon rather than on the ones around them. As more enter, the stage fills and the atmosphere picks up a tempo, subtly moving one of the dancers checking in and out of smoothly timed moves and manoeuvres.

Unlike To Bed with Love, 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 saw 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 dancers and audience, simple because not phisical was being put into it. Though most of the time he uses, possibly the most opposite of emotions, this is the same way in which Paas Bauch uses reality in her work. In 1986, for example, she has one dancer running, crossing the stage 30 or 40 times, shouting the words ‘I’m tired’. The dancer does not have to fear any fatigue to the audience, because the genuinely is tired, and the audience does not have to allow for any kind of artistic licence to be used by the choreographer, and accept that she would be tired – they don’t have to because they know she really is exhausted.

Ellie puts her piece into dialogue with the other pieces she has selected. She shows, for example, how Alley’s work is both ‘like’ and ‘unlike’ her own. She abstracts from details of work to show the primary common ingredients, in a common ingredient, in a common language, ‘naturalism’ it works by. She has used the same principle in her own work, she says, though ‘with the most opposite of emotions’. In making these moves, Ellie is arguing for her dance and its conventionalization within the ‘field’ (Tosolini 1990) of dance. By ‘arguing’ we mean the making of claims or statements based on evidence (grounded premises) that can be justified (warranted) by reference to a rule, principle or authority (see Tosolini et al. 1990). Evidence in this case is supplied by description of the dances. Justification comes through the articulation of rules (if dancers feel a certain strong emotion, the audience will recognize that emotion in the dancers’ bodies) and by invoking authority (‘a technique used by Bauch, which is recognized as a highly talented choreographer, is likely to be a good move’). Thus, Ellie is not reporting, but constructing her justifications,
The 'Personal' in University Writing: Uses of Reflective Learning Journals

Phyllis Creme

In there a place and space for the expression of the 'personal', and is relevant in higher education? How can the personal be used and contrasted in the study and writing of academic disciplines by students and tutors? These are important questions for students trying to find their own sense of identity as students in higher education, as well as for their tutors who may have various and sometimes conflicting models of their task and responsibility. In this chapter I compare the different meanings attached to the notion of the 'personal' in the context of learning journals used in a disciplinary and an interdisciplinary course. By 'learning journal' I refer to what are variously called, for instance, 'reflective journals', 'study diaries' and 'learning logs', which are increasingly used in a wide range of courses in higher education. They are written on a regular, ongoing basis, and focus upon the students' processes of learning and their own relationship to the course material. Their use in higher education brings to the fore the complex issue of the meanings and status of the personal in student academic writing.

The problematic nature of an apparently innocent suggestion to students to make use of their personal position was thrown up by my work in an action research project on the use of 'new forms of student writing' that were introduced alongside traditional essays in courses taught by social anthropology faculty at UNSW 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 form of writing, all of which can be defined as a 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 dead, this course was included in the same way that I 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 Sydney University.
The research

Taking an "academic literacies' approach, informed, for example, by research carried out by Lea and Street (Chapter 2), I aimed to place the students' writing in the context of the pedagogical and institutional setting in which it was produced. From the start, therefore, I was looking at the purposes and rationale for the introduction of the journals and how they were used in the context of research. In the area of epistemological assumptions about their courses, and their attempts to justify the research and to present opportunities of the new forms of writing. I want to argue that, although the ‘personal’ was defined, constructed and experienced in different ways, the very fact that it came up as an issue during this research demonstrated that the new forms of writing gave students an opportunity to define for themselves their own pathways within their university courses that many valued highly.

Benefits of the use of learning journals

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

First, journals give students an opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing fluency. It is a

The discipline: the ‘personal’ and ‘reflectivity’

The introduction of the new forms of writing was related to a continuing discipline-based debate about the status of the researcher and of writing within the disciplines of 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

theme of this book that writing is a major means by which students construct their disciplinary knowledge. The idea that writing does not, regardless and at length helps to develop student understanding and helps to develop a contextualized base, recognizing the complexity of writing process. The process has been proved effective in the creation of a sense of ownership and understanding of the process and the discipline—often in their surprise—by many years. Writing learning journals is not necessarily about ‘free writing’, particularly when they are written as public documents, but it certainly has more of that flavour then as the usual work that students do at university ‘it flows more easily, as many students put it. In asking students to keep a regular learning journal, times foregrounded the idea of writing in a process and a tool for learning rather than as a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge. As a module, it is a major purpose of the journals to ‘make the process of learning visible’ both to the students themselves and to those reading and assessing them.

Second, writing journals enabled students to construct ‘maps’ of the complex structures and relationships in a course or range of material. One of the reasons that tutors gave for introducing learning journals was that they asked students to ‘make connections’ between ideas within the course and to ‘understand’ it. This was a recurring theme in students’ discussion about their writing. Descriptive writing is often more effective than, for example, summary discussion because it can be a cumulative and progressively informative process of meaning-making that produces a visible, substantial record which can be revisited and, as appropriate, used in assignments. Regular writing, therefore, enables the students to construct connections and patterns that cannot be formulated in any other form, such as talking or memory. It allows them to become their own best readers in what was an extremely challenging and demanding course, and how they define the terms of thinking about a subject. As Bauman (1988: 110) puts it: ‘the problem of choosing which words to put on a page looks forward to a whole world rather than inward to a contained technology’. For the students I worked with, the front line of their ‘whole world’ was represented by a general consensus as to what knowledge they were expected to learn, and how they decided the terms of thinking about a subject. As Bauman (1988: 110) puts it: ‘the problem of choosing which words to put on a page looks forward to a whole world rather than inward to a contained technology’. For the students I worked with, the front line of their ‘whole world’ was represented by a general consensus as to what knowledge they were expected to learn, and how they decided the terms of thinking about a subject. As Bauman (1988: 110) puts it: ‘the problem of choosing which words to put on a page looks forward to a whole world rather than inward to a contained technology’. For the students I worked with, the front line of their ‘whole world’ was represented by a general consensus as to what knowledge they were expected to learn, and how they decided the terms of thinking about a subject. As Bauman (1988: 110) puts it: ‘the problem of choosing which words to put on a page looks forward to a whole world rather than inward to a contained technology’.

The personal in the production of anthropological knowledge

Anthropologists have always been ‘reflective’ in two related senses. First, they have concerned themselves with recognising how knowledge about the world is situated. Anthropologists, for example, describe the tribe in which they live, and the way in which the tribe is situated in the world. Secondly, they have concerned themselves with the idea of the ‘self’ in relation to knowledge and its production. What appears to be important 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, ideological and material aspects of anthropological writing. The result of this process, which can be related to the notion of modernity, has led to debates about the notion of the ‘personal’ in the production of anthropological knowledge.

The term goes on to question the notion of ‘the personal’ in student writing:

The term of ‘personal knowledge/experience/opinion’ appears problematic in student writing. It is common to see this term as implying the guidelines for essay-writing that students should develop their own argument - the imperative seems even stronger when dealing with this new form of student writing. However, as this is a reflection on the process of the student’s own position and that any personal experience is not always sure precisely what this means and particularly when it is not explained why it is so personal. However, as this is a reflection on the process of the student’s own position and that any personal experience is not always sure precisely what this means and particularly when it is not explained why it is so personal. However, as this is a reflection on the process of the student’s own position and that any personal experience is not always sure precisely what this means and particularly when it is not explained why it is so personal.

There seems to be an overall consensus in the work that has been done on this topic. Writing learning journals is not necessarily about ‘free writing’, particularly when they are written as public documents, but it certainly has more of that flavour than as the usual work that students do at university ‘it flows more easily, as many students put it. In asking students to keep a regular learning journal, times foregrounded the idea of writing in a process and a tool for learning rather than as a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge. As a module, it is a major purpose of the journals to ‘make the process of learning visible’ both to the students themselves and to those reading and assessing them.

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and in their own autobiographies, new forms of writing can enable students to make new kinds of connections between their lives, the texts they are reading and even more profound and social science concepts. This reflection should inhibit both non-academic and academic life - explicit reflection on learning enabled greater awareness of how learning "fit together" and how knowledge changes the course of study. This focus on learning itself should ultimately be in better hands.

(Mitchell 1998; emphasis added)

On the development of the students' "own voice as scholars" and terms such as "original", "individuality" and "creativity", which were also the subject of " Briefly done", the report points to a mismatch between students' understandings of originality as the notion of "personal knowledge" and anthropology's notion of expectations that this would be "freely anchored within intellectual debate". This brings to the fore how ideas of the personal are constructed, in this case between teachers and students, who were concerned to express their "own opinion". The following statement in the report demonstrates how it is the tutor, as the representative of the discipline, who has the power to make decisions about what goes into student writing and what stays out.

A "creative" or "individual" essay defines new conversations or original insight and thereby introduces new arguments to the debate. Such arguments cannot be forged from purely personal opinion or individual experience alone.

(Mitchell 1998)

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

The students' use of the personal in terms of writing is given a different gloss by Henly (1998), who posits a way of conceiving the (academic) writer's "identity" as different from writing "self"; the "autobiographical self", comprising the identity the writer brings to an act of writing, the "authorial self", which is the writer's authorship and authority that can be discerned by the reader, and which may be experienced by the writer as "ownership" and control of the text they write, and the "discursive self" that is inscribed in the genre and linguistic features of the text itself. Both describe some of the discursive characteristics of acceptable academic writing that appear in students' essays, such as generalization and abstraction, and on a broader textual level, the presentation of a case and the answering of questions. The adoption of such features in academic writing positions the writer into taking on particular ways of knowing and thinking that do not invite personal knowledge or experience. In these terms, the question for my purposes here is how far the introduction of different forms of writing made a difference to the "writing self". The purpose of learning journals may be to introduce into the students' autobiographical selves (where these are multiple) in the text that students write at minute intervals to encourage them to reflect on the development of the authorial self. Another way of putting this is that offering different forms of writing expands the range of the discursive worlds that students can imagine, and that the more personal discourse of the journal comes to the transition to the adoption of the new autobiographical self involved in being a university student.

Different courses, different journals

These issues surrounding the diverse meanings of the personal in the new forms of writing emerged in a focused way in my study of the two courses on political anthropology and death. I do not want to suggest too great a difference between the aims of the new writing on the two courses, for they had much in common in their intention of engaging students with their material. Nevertheless, the differences were marked and had important effects on the students' writing.
The "new writing" on the two courses had different titles that rather nearly reflected these different purposes as the tutors saw them: the Personal Study and the Death Journal. The second-year political anthropology course was seen as an important theoretical foundation to the final-year options that demanded a greater degree of independent work on the part of the reader than the course had done so far. It was here that the process towards helping the student to think like an anthropologist (as the aims of the degree had been expressed) seemed to come fruition - tutor's spoke of qualitative shifts in student work at this point. The death course was described as foundational in a different sense: as an introductory/laboratory course in 'critical reading' in the first term of the first year of the degree. The aim of the death course was to introduce students to academic practices, which also involved a shift in students' conceptual position. Making use of the 'personal writer' notion of writing had different meanings according to the different values and epistemological frameworks of the discipline-specific and the interdisciplinary course. To some extent - as a course taught by a social anthropologist - these differences were also tied up with the disciplinary framework.

These different ideas of the "personal" were discernible in how the two journals were presented, taught and assessed, and were clearly present both in the rubric for each of the 'new forms of writing' and in the way in which the tutors discussed them, as I consider later. The Personal Study was seen as a way of using the personal to develop students' anthropologically informed understanding, whereas the Death Journal, set within the interdisciplinary course, gave more scope for exploration of the personal - the student's "autobiographical self" - in its own right.

The Record of Study

The political anthropology course formally launched the Record of Study in the following way:

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

It is designed to encourage reflectivity about your own learning.

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

This indicates how the Record of Study was intended to reflect in title: its major theme is the tutors' expressions to see to develop the students' understanding of the concepts presented in the course - concepts that themselves changed and were contested over time, in accordance with changing theoretical positions. The tutors' thinking in introducing the Record of Study is very clear in an interview I had with the course consultant: 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 contesting similar arguments found in different contexts and seeing that there was some cumulative aspect to their learning. Finally, we wanted them to be reflexive 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 seems to be promoting is the idea of the student as thinker and opinion-panelist, trying to grasp new ideas, and as a writer who thinks about her own position with regard to the course material. In this context the personal is to do with the students' intellectual stance and their social/political identity. The reasons 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 the way they worked and effectively they were able to take on the task of writing the record of study, as a number explained me in discussion. Here is an extract from one record of study:

The Personal in University Writing

We had great difficulty in defining what a society was and weren't sure, for example, whether travelers were part of our actors 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 my marks on the whole have been very good. 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 wandering off.

The writers' taking through their thinking about the ideas presented in the course, which are interpreted with comments about their 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 recognizes 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 consultant's impression of the subject group and in the feedback gathered from the students about the record of study - these students do not write generally about his own life 'experiences'; rather, the relevant (personal) experience in this context is the course-specific process of reading, seminars, reflecting and writing pieces for assessment.

The autobiographical self, to use Henly's terminology, that comes through in this writing is that of an engaged student of the course. Even the personal of this self is recorded in terms of studying and learning in the passage about the writer's problem in 'concentrating on the subject'. The concern also demonstrates a confident authorial self - the writer's sense of authority, which is expressed, for example, in the slightly paternal use of language in his own framing of the fragment of the bubble theory, and the almost intimate address to the reader 'mate' - maybe you've noticed I tend to wander off the point! The difference between this writing and the students and tutors perceived it is that the writer is more able to bring in aspects of an autobiographical self to this context, and through use of the different kind of writing, construct a new kind of discursive self. He is writing differently in a way that provides an effective narrative on his reactions to the subject 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 issues or problems.
- The course aims to introduce students to a range of themes central to the School. . . . It seeks to understand the individual’s experience in society through modes of imagination and comprehension of the social sciences, literature and the arts.

The rubric for the Death Journal said:

- The purpose of the journal is to provide a space where students can: record and reflect on representations and explanations of death . . . in various forms of the popular media . . . literature . . . artistic work (a 'scribbbook' format was suggested).
- consider contemporary issues surrounding death and their own thoughts on this.
- reflect on 'personal' encounters with death or dying.
- reflect on assigned readings.
- 'read across' texts . . . make links between different readings on the course.

The journal, its shape, content and scale vary a great deal depending on the author and I hope that students will make it their own.

The use of the first person here may be a signal of the self’s 'tune'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 fiction was also a ‘critical’ and ‘scholarly’ one. In a conversation, she elaborated on what she hoped students would get from the course and particularly from the experience of writing their journals:

One of the main things I’m trying to get them to do is to challenge, deconstruct, . . . the way common-sense views about there being a single and right way to do things and getting to realize there are all kinds of ways . . . and that I see 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 that experience of being a scholar. It also means students being able to understand how different kinds of writing are seen as valid in the academic setting — not as means to a different 'academic' kind of understanding, but in their own right, to be articulated, refined and developed in ways that the writer herself decided.

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

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

The death journal was not strongly presented in terms of an individual voice but both 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 subtly spoke of differences in their different writing ‘is the impression of “writing for myself” in the journals contrasted for many with the need to adapt to “academic” ways of writing. That sense of “writing for myself” might be variously interpreted — for example, in terms of a sense of “essential” self, or in terms of identities that felt more “real” to the students, perhaps because more long-lasting and enduring, 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 empowering and liberating. This did not necessarily mean that the writing was ‘easy’ and in practice it was hedged around with their different senses of authority. In some cases, writing a journal posed as many difficulties as any kind of writing might, and about some guidelines on “what to write”, which they had to consider in relation to their readers and the course setting. There was therefore sometimes a tension between their sense of operating as an ‘individual’ and the demands of a particular writing task. All the same, the

The reflection report quoted above. Throughout the death course there was a kind of syncretic movement between a disciplinary (anthropological) and an interdisciplinary stance, and between a focus on what might be perceived as ‘scholarly’ and ‘personal’ experience. However, this is not a suggestion, whereas the personal voice was present in the course’s orientation of these two ways of knowing. At the first seminar the tutor presented her reasons for teaching the course: it was an anthropologist’s perspective that set the course in the context of the social construction of death. However, this was not as an anthropologist and this ‘dominant’ orientation was countered by several factors that opened up discussions of other perspectives:

- the choice of books, which included fiction and psychology, and the encouragement to talk about personal experience, enabled divergent approaches to be introduced. Here are some quotations from students about their reactions to the course and to writing the journal;

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

The journals are enjoyable — you work outwards from one idea. In an essay you have to select, whittle down.

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

It was nice to have an opportunity for self-expression in this setting.

It was like having a conversation with myself.

The tutor expressed her pleasure that students felt ‘comfortable’ being able to talk and write about experiences — in this case about a precipitation of death and life after death — that were not part of their personal framework, that they would not have introduced herself, and that would not have appeared in any anthropology course.

The relatively free-flowing structure of the seminars was reflected in and consistent with the requirement of the journals, which allowed students an opportunity to make choices about content and to make connections between the two. The representation of death in the public domain and their personal experience. The notion of ‘understanding’ became a more integrated matter than is the case in higher education, one that neither sided out the personal nor allowed it to dominate. Personal thinking and experiences were seen as valid in the academic setting — not just as 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.

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

Directions

I am suggesting that the careful use of learning journals can offer a rather liberating opportunity for students to chart their own course through their studying in higher education. The records of death 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 their university writing ways of knowing that are usually absent from it, and opened up a different kind of space for their engagement with the course. By inviting students’ autobiographical selves to appear centrally on the academic stage, the journals offered a way of fostering the development of a confident authorial self that claims the right to write as a university student. By asking students to write differently, the journals allowed them to think differently. In this way 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 readers the opportunity for enjoying their range and diversity. As the tutor on the death course put it: ‘I like being surprised by the creativity of my students’.

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I should like to acknowledge the help of Sussex University social anthropology tutors, particularly Jane Garraw, Jon Mitchell, Jeff Pratt, Alexander Schulenburg, Richard Wilson and Jane Whitebread; and of the students who took part in the ‘New Forms of Student Writing’ project. The views expressed here, and any shortcomings, are my own.
A brief retrospect

Before the introduction of formal partnerships between schools and universities, students who embarked on the PGCE course were offered few written guidelines concerning the assignments they had to produce for assess-
ment purposes. The main requirement was that they should relate theory to practice in an "enquiry". This specification had as its implicit corollary an idealised identity for the teacher trainee. The PGCE student was assumed to be an active and independent learner who would benefit from consid-
erable freedom to pursue her own particular areas of interest – this being regarded as the pathway to the enhancement of her identity as an active, creative and autonomous practitioner, her agency. In other words, the student writer was expected to process those dispositions which progressive pedagogy advocated for her to foster in learners in schools. This perception of knowledge and autonomy as a vernacular construction of knowl-
edge correlated with a view of writing which reaches back to the Romantic period and emphasises creativity and individual experiences in meaning-
making.

The final assessment of the students' assignments was consistent with this emphasis. Though the promotion of minimal criteria might seem to allow students a number of possibilities, the assignments which were marked high grades were usually strongly interpretive in their orientation. To be more specific, the students tended to follow the same basic pattern in which the exposition of theory was tied out not of concrete data such as vignettes from classrooms, or transcripts of recorded talk, as expected from policy documents. Consequently, through 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 individually distinctive and personally relevant perspective on some aspect of educational practice. It was, however, a perspective which avoided simplistic conclusions instead it showed an awareness of complexity and an attention to context.

The examiners' comments on the highly rated assignments added an-
other dimension to this emphasis on individual and personally relevant meaning-making. The assignments were treated as if they were 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' 'interest in understanding', and to their being 'sensitive and knowledge-
able', 'imaginative' and 'insightful'. There were some references to tra-
ditional academic criteria such as 'this is a cogent argument', 'there is evidence of wide reading'. Such criteria were, however, usually shaped into personal qualities – for example:

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

From the concerns of the 'real world' is remitted in form which derive at least some of their creative power from that derogated cultural myth of the 'busy user' in which reflection is held to be a nebulous and inadequate substitute for the concrete immediacy of action.

As a result of the critique of educational theory along these lines for some time. As early as 1983, for example, Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, referred to 'jargon-winders theorizing' (Joseph, 1983). Such attacks became more vehement in the early 1990s, culminating in the statutory requirement that schools play a greater role in the training of teachers. Thus it is schools that are now linked to training institutions in formal partnership arrangements 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 (Wilkins, 1996: 174). Like most teacher trainers, Carson (1995: 151) defines this focus against its critics: 'Reflective practice does not mean an attitude of thoughtfulness that is necessary for teach-
ing in these uncertain and changing times.' A consequence of this view is that the individual learner is encouraged to think of herself as a 'reflective practitioner'. This image, which seems to confer a definite identity, is, how-
ever, highly problematic. It is not easy to see why it would become the teacher education that, as Carson (1995: 151) himself has commented, it tends to be no more than an empty (right)

The phrase reflective practitioner has been used abroad in the land. So much so that student teachers will roll their eyes at the very mention of the 'R-word'. Surely it is a term that has been overused in teacher edu-
cation and students are right to object to its endless and often empty repetition. This comment matches my own observations as a novice. Consequently, in this chapter I attempt to put back 'reflective practitioner' some of the complexity which is too often eroded out – a complexity which carries important pedagogic implications especially in relation to student writing.

To pursue that aim I shift the focus from 'reflective practitioner' 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 sense of self, and what most needs to be understood is, as I shall shortly indicate, this entails questions of identity and subjectivity.

New contexts have, however, led to new conceptions of the kind of

agency, and so of agent, which the PGCE course should foster. In order to understand these new conceptions it is useful to look at the relations between student writing in the early 1990s. I have my comments on a study which I carried out in my role as a PVC (name) on the 'education compo-
nent', as it was then called.

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

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

This tendency to treat the students' texts as indices of their identity is problematic. However, this problem should not be seen as deriving solely from a possible mismatch between the qualities suggested by an individual student's assignment and those the student might need to demonstrate in the classroom; such an explanation would be overly simplistic. What most needs to be questioned, since it would reinforce certain assumptions concerning the student's subjectivity – assumptions which can be buttressed by broadening those aspects of Bendich's (1996: 36) characteristic of 'competence' which identify the latter with an 'inbuilt creativity, and the autonomous conceptions of 'realism' and 'competence' as thus described, serve to make visible the alliance that was being forged on the PGCE course, between, on the one hand, progressive view of the learner, and, on the other, the view of student writing as the expression of inner capacities implicitly regarded as the source of a teacher's agency in the classroom. The challenge of this alignment is to in turn become into style, and so its openness to discussion, what has been edited out – any suggestion that writing does not come naturally even at the postgraduate level. Once we attempt to educate that omission and so begin to focus on student writing as part of their education, we are increas-
ably confronted with issues relating to language. I do not, however, restrict language in this context to its lexical and grammatical forms. Few of the PGCE student had difficulties of that kind. In fact most of them were fluent and experienced academic writers. My focus is rather on a student assignment as a text being shaped by the writer; in short, an example of written discourse (Bauman, 1991). This, I would suggest, is an approach which could address what the students themselves perceived to be their most pressing difficulty. As one of them put it:

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

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

A new context: teacher training as a partnership

When the examiners' primary criteria was an interpretative focus in which she directed the individual act of meanings, texts graduate, and
especially those with degrees in English, tended to obtain higher grades than did science or math graduates. This is not surprising, since the students could transfer to classes of interest and schools of the kind of close interpretative reading with which they were already familiar.

The recognition of how the assignments assigned me to a particular class of students while disadvantageous others was one factor which led to the development of new, more detailed guidelines. However, as I shall indicate below, the introduction of the summary requirement that teachers submit writing guidelines to the school means that these guidelines are a more detailed and explicit specification that was required. Adopting an even wider perspective, I see a possible link between the more detailed character of the new guidelines and a change in the general perception of learners and learning in higher education. The new guidelines can be said to reflect a growing emphasis in UK universities on the importance of pedagogy – an emphasis which has led to an insistence that unmet research criteria be met explicit to students. A selective plundering of Bernstein's (1986) theories once again help me to crystallize this change of form 'performance', a term which subsumes 'specified output' and the 'explicit rules for regulating them', has replaced 'compliance'. It is another way, by drawing on the current government-senior language of teacher training 'compliance' has been used to 'compliance' of the students' study. In other words, as this reference to Bernstein indicates, I seek to avoid the mythical view of the writer which I outlined above and associated with 'compliance'. In place of the detached, abstract, self-centred view of the writer who was regarded as an expression of personal qualities or dispositions, I propose a text in which the writer is primarily visible in the connections she makes with, and between, the object of study, the literature of the field, and the anticipated reader(s).

In Brown's paper, the four contexts both impose a coherence on the three examples of academic discourse which he discusses, and emphasize much more clearly the differences in the shaping of the three texts. The 'object under study' – the structure of DNA, the observation of science, and Wodehouse's later poems – are represented in terms of their modularity: DNA is an object that exists in the world, the ambiguity of science is, however, a concept which is constructed in the minds of scientists; and Wodehouse's later poems are the meditations of Hartman's 'subjective recreation of the poetic moment'. It is from these differences in the 'object under study' that Brown argues that Hartman largely derives his account of the differences in the other contexts. The use of the literature of the field and the role of the anticipated audience in this case the audience's points of view) is clearly reflected in what is regarded as accepted knowledge in each case. Thus Cicero and Wodehouse do not add to the relative qualities of the DNA but only detail the situation that it can be supposed that its structure, while Meroni has to show that the work is visible in a significant subset of the literature about scientific behaviour. Hartman, on the other hand, does not need to refer to other writers' readings in order to position himself in the context that his interpretation is both plausible and enriching of their response.

It is not my purpose to evaluate Brown's paper in terms of its adequacy as an account of academic discourse or to use it to develop a theory of writing. What Brown offers me is a theoretical orientation or complement to my previous work with regard to the notion of cause-and-effect discourse as an academic discourse he analyses, and the tensions in the PGE' students' assignments which are not made visible by the perspective – a perspective which matches Bernstein's description of 'compliance'. This is evident in the assignment's full and concise summaries of the emphasis continued. The assignment outlines a general understanding of the formal corollary of this view of knowledge and its implications for the readers of Bernstein's in their agency 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 the seeking of expertise will no doubt enhance her practice, 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 embodies competent-oriented discourses which locate agency in an empowering personal meaning-making (in so much as, in view of her enthusiasm her identity might be said to be that of a disciple); on the other hand, she is also a practising teacher encountering performance-oriented discourses such as 'transferrable skills'. However, since she assumes that competence discourses should translate into rules for the realization of specialized outputs, she sees no contradiction between 'personal meaning-making' and 'transferrable skills' or between Lexicon's (1996) competence view of communication and the performance strategies of the communicative approach to language teaching to which she refers approximately 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 primarily one of incompetence. I have described A as aspiring to the modern. Her assignment is thoughtful and perceptive, and the level of discourse which the text would suggest is remarkably high. However, whereas in the early 1990s the PGCE students with high grades developed a personal perspective of teacherly knowledge in terms of exemplars of practice, the assignments of the high achievers among the beginning teachers now need to demonstrate an understanding of the need for a broader view of a subject for which I suggested earlier, this lack of connection between 'personal meaning-making' and 'transferrable skills' or between Lexicon's (1996) competence view of communication and the performance strategies of the communicative approach to language teaching to which she refers approximately in the descriptions of actual lessons which she includes in her assignment.

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Beginning teacher B's assignment

Beginning teacher B experienced the same dual burdens of being beginning teacher A, but handled it differently in her assignment. Whereas A is primarily concerned with the application of the theory to practice (she is in line with B, B concentrates on practice. In fact, she implicitly, and almost immediately, presents practical solutions more 'real' than theory. This suggests that the 'object under study' is initially 'differentiation targeting different abilities', the meaning of this concept is dealt with briefly - a definition shown from Capel (1995) 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 concretized 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.

(Harp (1995: 121))

Harping thus disposes 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 in fact a school policy which is implemented in most classes, she arrives at her main point. First, teachers did not always perceive of pupils. Following the patterns of research provided in the assignment guidelines, she then frames a question -

To what extent can differentiation targeting ability and learning styles help teachers in their daily practice?

This question suggests that the object under study derive students relating to her asiduous 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, to give the sense or sources is 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, 'Grande proposed', 'she (a support teacher) believes'; 'topping critics', according to Reid et al. However, in referring to her own research, she does on a positivist paradigm, attributing the status of the real and certain to her results and conclusions. She 'discovered', the teacher produces 'finding'. She alludes to responding to Gardner'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 once again that holding a positivist model of theory is not a practice. However, she assumes that it can only do so if it is legitimate and is not an obstacle to the development of a fuller, richer model. This is the model that she will employ in her teaching.

In conclusion, she would like to see her main experience as the teaching she does in the nursery, and as a side issue in her assignments to the role of a support teacher in the nursery. She sees that her role in the nursery is to be a support teacher and not a lead teacher. She sees her role in the nursery as a way of gaining experience in teaching younger children and of helping her to develop her teaching skills.

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, I turn finally to issues of pedagogy which rest on my selective borrowing and reconfiguring of 'competence' and 'performance'. As far as it is identified with an 'embodied creativity', 'competence' can imply that writing cannot be taught. 'Performance', on the other hand, can suggest that all aspects of teaching can be acquired as explicit rules or realizations or 'transferrable skills'. As a result, we need to question the 'competence' view of the student writing, while relating the extremes of 'performance'. Steering between these, students who see their writing as a means to an end, who can see the whole picture, who can see the bigger picture, who can see the more general picture. This is to be credited to the freedom that Saffa and Cholodow's no task can take place any more detailed maps, each of us, like each of our students, has finally to find own room; and an anesthetized of the need to find a route can only help, as can discussion with colleagues (in both the school and the university) who can help.

Such discussion should not, of course, be seen as simply appropriate to teacher training. It should have a place, too, in other professions, such as business administration, nursing, law and librarianship, where students also move between the workplace and the university. In fact, I would argue that primary students could be in a better position to understand and negotiate the tensions deriving from those two worlds. The secondary teachers should be giving writing a more prominent pedagogical role. What I have in mind is a series in which the numerous issues pertaining to each of Biscare's four corners would be addressed in relation to a concept of writing which would include the wider writing contexts of the class, of the school, and of the curriculum.
A Question of Attribution: The Indeterminacy of 'Learning from Experience'

Simon Pardee

Introduction

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

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

What is 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 uncoordinated aspects of students' texts.

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

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

This applies also within 'study skills' courses which prepare students for academic study. In such courses the students are often engaged in activities in groups of mixed disciplines, and the tutors are under pressure to claim that the activities and experience they provide have the kind of generality and relevance implied by the notion of 'skills'. For example, even in school, physics students may measure the gravitational pull of the earth for themselves, by conducting an experiment to measure the way an object accelerates when dropped. They learn both about the practices of experimentation in science, and about gravity.

However, this learning process involves a process of attribution. If students measure an object's acceleration to be, say, 9.83 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. Other words, they have to attribute their result to the consequences in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity.

The point is that this line of thought, and the basic idea for it, may never be explicitly discussed. Through recording teacher-student and student-student conversations in science classes (Kaminski, Hewson and Maier 1985) and others show teachers caught in the difficult position of believing students should 'discover' for themselves, but also wanting them to know the 'right answer'. They show teachers attributing significance and insufficiency to the students' different measurements, guided by their own knowledge of what the result should be. They show students acquiring with judgements made by the teacher, and accepting or rejecting measurements and hypotheses, 'on no basis that is ever explained to them' (S骛ders and Mercer 1987: 124).

The implication is that students learn to attribute significance and insufficiency to their measurements, often by attempting, or failing, to produce what is expected. Ironically, in doing so they mimic the intended practices of science—performing and testing observations so as to produce empirical findings that are accountable to their evidence.)

**Within science education**

Within science education, the notion of learning by doing or learning by experience has become almost the dominant pedagogy. Students learn not only the practices of science but even the course content by 'finding things' out for themselves, by doing experiments, by 'discovery'. For example, even in school, physics students may measure the gravitational pull of the earth 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, 9.83 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. Other words, they have to attribute their result to the consequences in the classroom, rather than to actual variations in gravity.

**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 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 atom, or different ways of measuring 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 new practices. While they may be involved in learning new practices from particular experiences. Yet aspects of these particular experiences may not illuminate new patterns or potential new practices; they may equally represent practices that are particular to the company or institution, or particular to a single case. Moreover, rather than representing the aims or ideals of the profession, they may represent the responses of professional practice to certain constraints of time and resources. I show this in Figure 8.3.

Within the workplace, students are not only studying the significance of their experiences, the learner may also attribute an experience in ways that are different from the undergraduates 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 'normal' or 'unnormal'.)

**Within vocational education**

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

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

As before, this attribution is a very fundamental process of assigning significance to an activity or experience. If the tutor or students attribute an
activity or experience to the wider profession, they will see it as significant and learning. If they attribute it to the ‘here and now’ of the course, they will see it as insignificant or irrelevant to ‘real professional practice’.

They will also see it as not worthy of inclusion in their professional text. This attribution is therefore central to the students’ developing understanding and learning, and to their writing.

If you are familiar with vocational education you will recognise 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 ‘irrelevant’, the tension between the ‘real world’ of employment and the ‘academic’ world of higher education is very live. 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 ‘vocational’, and that the students will be writing, say, a ‘proper report’, as they would do in a professional context. It is common for students talking to each other in these terms. The terms can come to a course with an instructor and be used to frame the ‘kind of professional work’ in which they might be engaged in a future career. They may even be quite dismissive of an activity as ‘not real’, and may draw on their prior knowledge and assumptions of ‘real’ professional practice in guiding their writing.

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

Two examples of attribution

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

Example 1: Experiencing and attributing uncertainty in the scientific data

In interview, the tutor told me that one of the key intensions of this course was to underline the idea that in science you always have the data you want. He argued for the importance of understanding the often uncertain and provisional nature of claims that are made in science – especially within environmental science and EIA.

You see with most of what we teach, we definitely give students the idea that science is in itself... something which is entirely under control... which is not true... because... you only... draw conclusions which are as good as the data you’ve collected... and the bit of data you may collect tomorrow may invalidate all you’ve done already.

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

His critique of most of the students’ final texts was that despite this uncertainty their calculations were reported with certainty, as a fact, and their conclusion was categorical, as the following examples demonstrate:

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

(Nick)

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

(Helena)

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

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

How do you know?

and then sees them as:

a collection of assertions without any discussion.

He says this because there is an unfortunate habit within education of attributing unambitious student writing first to students’ lack of effort, understanding or ability, and second to the tutor’s lack of expertise or ‘poor explanation’. These may often be issues, but, as readily available and easy ‘explanations’, they are ways of avoiding recognising the key role of teaching and learning academic and professional writing, by blaming individuals. In the short term they involve an unhelpful denigration of the efforts and expertise of tutors and students. In the long term they prevent real improvement in our collective professional practice and understanding, and undermine the expertise and value of education.

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

Explanations are often identified for a lack of experience in the ‘real world’ beyond education. In this case, the tutor was himself a practicing professional in environmental impact assessment. He had considerable experience of the ‘real world’ of profession. This is partly why his course was so interesting in terms of its promotion of scholarship. He frequently described his own professional experience, and told the students that this course activity offered them a ‘real experience of EIA’. In other words, he frequently and explicitly attributed the course to the professional context.

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

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

In the analysis I explored the apparent origins of the students’ texts that the tutor had criticized in his assessment. I went back to the recordings of the student discussion, and to the moments when they discussed these particular features or aspects of their texts. I was interested in the
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 was that he had already given it. He had told them that the set of data they were given was exactly as they might find in a professional. He told them it was ‘real’. He said it was what the environmental impact assessors would be using if this development actually went ahead. It is therefore important to ensure how these claims can 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 already very familiar with claims from tutors that courses were ‘real’, and regarded these quite sceptically. They saw them as part of the tutor claiming legitimacy for the course; the claims refine the assumption that the course is removed from the ‘reality’ of professional practice. Indeed, information about vocational courses is often precisely about how they offer ‘real’ experience. The students did not perceive the claims of this tutor to be serving any other function; they did not identify these particular claims as offering potentially useful guidance for writing the text.

Second, as the tutor had asserted (above), the students conversely brought to the course an idealized view of science and professional practice. They drew on experience and information that they were already given enough data to make claims with certainty. This was a greater belief that science necessarily achieves truth, 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 (quorums above); it would not make uncertain claims from limited data. What the tutor had not anticipated was the resilience of these assumptions — the way in which they could be sustained by a principle of discounting experience within educational settings as well as a ‘real’. In effect, the students’ idealizations of truth could be sustained by the experience of uncertainty that he could offer. They were even able to withstand his explicit assumption of uncertainty in examples of professional EIA in his lectures. The students saw these as examples of ‘what should not have happened’; they individualized the experience of uncertainty rather than taking them as indicators of a wider ‘reality’ within the profession.

‘To guide students’ attribution of the experience of uncertainty within vocational education, we would therefore see 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 the students’ varied attributions. It would seem necessary to address in some detail what aspects of the activity or experience we want them to recognize as insights into the professional practice.'
The students' conclusion, and the implications for their text
Within the students' meetings, when they were trying to work out exactly what to do, the notion of choosing an extraction technique became increasingly confusing. Without a clear understanding of the rationale for this "choice", which varied from one learner to another even within the same problem area, it was possible for both the status of it, and the capacity in which they were taking it, to shift freely within their discussions, and finally in their text.

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

The tutor's written comments on the text reveal the significance of this in terms of the three methods of their text. He empathised their sense for announcing decisions as if they were already made, rather than informing future decisions.

We have underestimated the role of baseline stereotypes with only one possible scenario that of an independent arbiter whose role is to find an acceptable way for extraction, or if this is not even possible... etc. This implies that the decision already made was not as a basis for an open discussion of the merits of different approaches.

The shift is apparent if we look at extracts from their text. Here, for example, Alain makes categorial and authoritative assertions about the decisions and future actions of the developer, as if these decisions are already made, and as if he is actually party to these decisions and actions:

Section 2: Project description

Extraction of the aggregative will be done using a class-based... Three existing groups of hierarchies will be considered:.

Once the developer has decided on the possibilities and limitations that the system has been designed to be able to handle.

Along with the main alternative to the chosen method of a class-based developer, the extraction using a case-centred developer by the following shoe-shoe-conclusion:

This contrasts with a previously successful text (given to me by the tutor as an illustration of what he wanted) in which the authors - as independent consultant - instead describe "the decision making that will need to be taken, open the way to the 'acceptable', choose the best alternative, and from their analysis identify the key issues that will need to be addressed in this future decision about extraction methods. They therefore offer information and criteria to inform the reader in making a decision, and they motivate the distance of an apparently independent third party.

The implications for the student's learning
Since the general function of EA is to infer decisions (both by the developer and by the planning authority) the students' own shift from this, and towards the activity of 'deciding and assessing' them, represented a major leap of learning.

It is significant that making and announcing decisions is perhaps linguistically easier than seeking to explain the decisions of others. If the students were to recognise and take on the more challenging function of infering decisions, then they needed a crucial understanding of the norms of their 'choice' of developer within the professional scenario. They also needed a recognition that the first and function of their text was nothing new and unfamiliar, which they needed to learn. It involved more than 'reporting what they did' in the way that they were used to doing within lab reports. They would seem to have needed a guided look at how environmental assessment tests infer rather than announce decisions. This is precisely the guided 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 stew. These effectively threw into question both what they thought they were doing and what they thought EA was about. Their own reactions conform their shift into a very different scenario, and a different understanding of this text; rather than infering the activity of planning, their text has been part of the final submission for planning permission, in which all the decisions had been taken.

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

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

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

By this time, the students had, in effect done what was expected of them: within a pedagogy of 'learning by experience', they had made sense of the activity to be done; and an understanding of what a professional would do. The critique meant that they left the course confounded.

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

Clearly for the students, as they had shifted into their different scenario, they had nevertheless been able to sustain their actions with the knowledge that this was a 'real' consultant would do. There are indeed environmental assessments of the form they produced. However, the assumption that what is real must be acceptable is a dangerous one. It implicitly assumes a rather singular (as well as uncritical) view of EA.

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

Significantly, this need to focus on the diversity of practice and texts therefore contrasts directly contrary to the temptation in higher education to make the general claim that an activity is 'real', or reproduces 'real professional practice'. This kind of training (that is common in course publicity, and in tutor and student talk in vocational courses) is inadequate and potentially misleading. Instead, it involves a very general attribution that may actually encourage the students in understanding the significance of particular instructions and professional responsibilities, and also by way of comparison, the professional practice, to pursue practices that are 'real', but which were nevertheless not required, not functional and not appropriate in this particular instance.

Implications for researching student writing

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

In a short chapter such as this, one can only focus on a particular issue. However, it is important to stress that exploring the origins of unsuccessful writing not to claim a single 'cause'. This is likely to have underestimated the complex and subtle demands of the writing task, and to have simply ignored by the writers themselves. As I have argued elsewhere (Parsons 1991, 1999) it is important to explore the potential network of forces that together may have enabled, promoted, and sustained the students' unconscious understandings and writings. The question of attribution is likely to be one important element.

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A question of attribution

The way in which I have addressed the question of attribution has an important implication for how we view talk between tutors and students, and between students, about what is 'real' or 'realistic'. It is important to analyse the functions and the effects of these claims within the classroom, rather than simply joining into it. In this I mean that it is not helpful for researchers simply to react to the claims of vocational education (that the activities are 'real') by counter-claiming that they are 'not real'. I see this as a potential danger when, for example, because (1999) argues that knowledge and practice are inevitably 'fundamentally transformed' by being 're-contextualised' into the classroom, and that, for example, Forrester (1994) argues that student writing within professional simulations needs to be seen not as a process of bringing professional practices and texts into the classroom, but as types of texts in their own right, quite distinct from the 'real' workplace.

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

Implications for tutors in higher education

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

First, we should not assume that the significance of an experience is self-evident. As I have shown in Figures 8.1-8.4, learning from an activity or experience in an context involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as more generally significant, and what should be regarded as more particular. Within vocational education, where an activity or experience inevitably involves links to both the educational and professional contexts, the process of learning also involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as offering insight into the profession, and what should be regarded as being a consequence of doing it within the classroom. In order for students to understand a particular activity or experience in the way we intend, we need to make explicit the significance that we attach to it.

Second, we need to bear in mind that the very context and scientific course with an already scotched view of claims that an activity or an experience is 'real'. They may bring an established practice of denying
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 status 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 nonetheless give important insight into professional practice. After all, the educational context provides an opportunity for developing exactly the kinds of 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 slipping into explaining an activity solely in terms of the immediate classroom procedures. This fails to give students the understanding that they need of the rationale for the activity within the profession, and/or within the course. In particular, if students are to report their activity within a professional document, in the voice of a professional, they need an explicit understanding of this activity as a part of professional practice.

Equally, as tutors, we need to be wary of the general claims (common in vocational education) that a whole activity is 'real' or 'realistic'. These simply encourage students to assume that if they have followed 'real' practices and a 'real' text, then their own text must be acceptable. Instead, we need to develop their understanding of how the task and their text link to other 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 unorthodox to the experienced tutor, 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, even using evidence and previous research to produce an argument, then students need some guidance about how this is done. They cannot simply deduce the linguistic form and strategies of a professional text from the task or from the scenario, and they cannot reinvent it from first principles. Without guidance about how 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 provided texts need to differ from one scenario to another, they may feel it is acceptable to refer to any 'real' professional texts they find in an attempt to seem to have what is required. 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.

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Notes

1. I am adopting the practice of using single quotation marks around a term or phrase that is not in my own words, thus: "Elaboration". In the text above, the terms 'professional' and 'context' are both used.

2. Further studies that pursue an understanding of unsuccessful student writing include: Derry, Buehler, and New (1985), Nickerson (1980), and Buehler, Kaye, and Nickerson (1983). See also Parrett (1990).

3. Particularly available and interesting accounts of this within sociolinguistic studies of the construction of scientific knowledge include: Lotur (1975, 1977) and Gilbert and Muller (1984).

4. Transcribe symbols used:

   Speech

   / / indicates a pause or hesitation, roughly half a second per dot,

   / / indicates an apparent break between units of speech, indicated by

   the speaker through a change of tone or a pause;

   [ . . ] indicates that at this point in the extract some of the original

   utterance has been omitted;

   underlined indicates author's emphasis

   Witten text

   ... indicates that at this point in the extract some of the original

   text has been omitted.

5. The tutor's account of uncertainty in EIA drew on his experience as an environmental scientist, and his experience of making predictions from limited data, and his knowledge of the way in which EIA is used based on the very limited data available about a particular local area. His account would seem to be supported within the environmental assessment literature. A key introductory text on EA, Bainton and Tomlinson (1988, 1990) summarize the situation as follows.

Part 3

Contexts of Writing and Professional Learning
Writing for Success in Higher Education

Janice McMillan

Introduction

Writing in higher education is a challenging task for many students. Such 'literacy acts' or individual constructive acts, are, according to Flower (1994, 15):

...acts of association, recursion, divergence, and context. They happen at the intersection of diverse goals, values and assumptions, where social roles interact with personal images of one's self and one's situation ... they are often sites of negotiation where the meanings that people may reflect resolution, subduing contradiction, or perhaps just a temporary gap 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 'disempowerment' facing non-traditional mature learners once they have crossed the formal, institutional boundary (Weil 1986; Janes 1993) and it has been argued that there is often a tension between formal institutional access, and curriculum or epistemological access.

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

Background and context

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

Provision on both these programmes was non-formal, access to the institution being granted on the basis of previous experience. Given that the courses lacked formal accreditation, assessment took on the same non-formal nature, although 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 expertise they already possessed.

The notion of the 'critical reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987), explored by Elizabeth Houdaille-Mainse 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.

Shifts from non-formal to formal

Incorporation in access to higher education as well as problems in the relationship between higher education, national reconceptualisation and human resource development are currently high on the agenda in South Africa. The African National Congress's (ANC) Education and Training document (ANC 1994), on which the government White Paper (Department of Education 1994) is based, continually links access to the need for redress and equity. Access is thus viewed as providing equal opportunities to those who have had 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 entered the course programme 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 crucial 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 were more than doubled, from the usual 30-55 students per course to over 70. This move also brought a very diverse group of practitioner students on to our course, including both community-based educators and trainers and those located within a corporate or industry setting. The latter grouping included some students who already possessed undergraduate and even postgraduate university qualifications. What interested me, therefore, was to investigate and explore what possible 'academic combination of credentials' (Fairclough 1992a) students might be adopting in the process of learning in order to be successful. I wished to understand these through the students’ experiences of learning and writing.

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

Second, we understood, 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 "capture the discourse" (Gee 1990), or at least an important component of it. We recognized, however, the difficulties that students base with academic writing for assessment (see also Lea and Street, Chapter 2). Many students expect explicit learning in higher education added to this (Charters-Stracie 1991; Flower 1994; James 1990). James (1995) also argues that many students see grades rather than the intrinsic significance of assignments as they argue that we often overlook the role that both assessment and lecturers play in "legitimising higher education studies. This emerged in students' accounts of their learning. One student interviewed, Naomi, when asked what she felt about assessments, said that she felt it was a good thing because:

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

Another, Yasmin, where she did not do as well as she thought she might on a task, blamed us as lecturers:

I felt it was sort of your fault that I messed up the whole thing because you didn't quite make it clear to me or even what you wanted. If I had known, I could have . . . sort of got 80% for it.

Understanding learning: meaning-making and negotiation in context

Learning and writing: negotiating academic literacy demands

Thesen (1994), working from a sociocultural/sociologicist position, looks at academic language students' experiences of writing at university. She argues persuasively for an approach to learning which attempts to look at "voice or selectivity . . . [decoding] meaning in the individual" (Thesen 1994: 36), yet without losing the structural and contradictions this paper presents. Thesen believes we need to ask ourselves (where we think meaning can be found) and belief that discourse approach should be concerned with the interactions between people in a given context rather than relationships to text. This then allows for meaning to be located in the user or individual rather than the 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 1994: 25). She sees this interaction as an attempt to bring together the view 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

times from the margins. What is important is to understand that students are continuously making decisions in their learning. In particular, she argues that:

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

(Thesen 1994: 36)

Highlighting some of these issues in relation to student writing, Flower (1994) expands on the notion of discourse and the role students play in their own learning. She points to the importance of understanding learning as "negotiating meaning" and argues that we need to understand social cognitive processes as being a source of meaning and conflict among the many forces that act to shape meaning: the demands of the learning context as well as learners' own goals and knowledge. As a response to this tension and conflict, learners rise to the active negotiation of meaning, thereby creating meaning in the interaction of alternatives, opportunities and constraints (Cott, Flower 1994: 14), a literate act as "an individual constructive act . . . [which can] call for the orchestration of diverse, seemingly incommensurable practices . . . [these] also reflect the complex, even contradictory, goals and purposes that often drive meaning-making." This implies, following Clark and Green, (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 culture provides the range of possibilities which are competing for dominance. What the individual belongs to the task, in terms of his/her own attitudes towards it, beliefs about what is expected from the task and the purposes behind that particular task, behalf to the broader context of culture and affects the process and outcomes. The context of culture therefore, effects writing practices and, in, response, Clark and Green argue that we may either resist or conform to the patterns of privileging within the context of culture. Denning on theories of academic literacy, Healey (1988) further explores the contradictions and conceptions students experience as they negotiate academic knowledge in relation to the necessity of world of work, community and home. Lea (1986) 48 believes that 'central part of the learning process for students is experienced not just with the struggle between other familiar "ways of knowing" and "academic ways of knowing" but with different literacy practices that are associated with these'. In particular, she argues that adult learning offers conversations and challenge as students increase prior knowledge and ways of writing and reading texts with course requirement. In this process, students are both constructing new meanings and constructing new knowledge bases. In trying to understand

The study

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

My data consisted of interviews, informal group discussions, observations and pieces of assessed student writing. I adopted an ethnographic case study approach in order to collect "thick descriptions" of what was happening with some of my students. While my approach was, obviously, not a full ethnographic study in the anthropological sense of a "total social and cultural" view of it, I developed an approach that allowed me to incorporate culture and context as ways of understanding learning (see Thomas 1983, 1993; Thesen 1994). I conducted two interviews with all four students – one which foregrounded their experiences as students in the class, while the other foregrounded their lives outside the class as adults, as practitioners and as learners. During the first interviews, I focused my questions on the two aims of our course and specifically their experiences of writing assign- ments, 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 personal circumstances. I begin by presenting a brief biographical sketch for each. Given that I was interested in the different ways in which students construct roles and how these change their perceptions and experiences of writing, my analysis will focus more on their understanding of their writing than on their actual writing practices.

Yasmin: "maybe I'll do . . . tomorrow"

Yasmin, aged 37, is a single (widowed) parent of two children who lives in Mitchell's Plain (formerly a 'coloured' township) with her son, her sister's husband, and their child. She says that Mitchell's Plain is divided by a railway track and that she lives on the 'wrong side' where gangsters are rife and the unemployed sit around on the street corners.
Having grown up in Deep River, her family was moved to Maisonburg during the height of the Garoupe Area forced removals. When I asked her about the effect of political events in her life, she stated 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 senior year, getting married and having a child, Yasmine started working in a clothing factory as a machine operator. Nine years later she had her second child and decided she was not going back. I asked her if this was because she wanted to get involved with helping people:

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

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

The primary pattern of engagements I identified in Yasmine’s learning experiences was that of conflict (Kanowro 1990) – she also adopted it in many ways a challenge approach to her learning (Lee 1990). However, there was evidence of withdrawal and accommodation (Kanowro 1990) or reformulation (Lee 1990) in her accounts. Given strong linkages between her personal and learner identities, Yasmine’s experience demonstrated a fairly high sense of anxiety and conflict:

I wanted to give up at some stage.

 Students who learned the role of conflict, often experienced life difficulties, and, according to Kanowro (1990: 11), “there are unique in the intensity and breadth of their personal life difficulties. In terms of the kind of learner role she saw for herself, Yasmine felt that she was:

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

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

there’ll always be this power thing.

Yasmine spoke of the conflict between herself and the ‘professional’, other students on the course, the lecturer as perceived as thinking they were superior to her because of their formal job status. It appeared that some students were ‘in the discourse’ and she was ‘outside it’. This relates to Tumash’s comments about the different ways in which discourses ‘rub up against each other’ and how students deal with the conflict this creates; it is highlighted in the following extract of a poem by Yasmine:

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

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

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

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

However, it is not without conflict either. Given that she sees herself as a perfectionist – ‘precise makes perfect, but I’m not perfect and she often feels disappointed. This is both with herself and with the lecturers like if I did an assignment and didn’t get the marks I thought I would get very upset with myself.

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

I nearly didn’t write this assignment because it dealt with politics (it was concerned with the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a key piece of legislation aimed at addressing socioeconomic transformation and reform). Yet 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 bring along the antipathy 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 environment:

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

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

Nomi’s processes of meaning making and negotiation had, therefore, to take place largely outside the social structures 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 maximum of recalling her past experiences – work and life more broadly - that learning really had meaning for her, as I would argue, she used this to negotiate success in her own assessed writing.

According to Kanowro (1990), the primary pattern of interaction is that of transformation, and this is the most integrated and yet complex pattern of engagements. Students engaging in this way are uniquely positioned to break 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 Nomi’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 own practice, as well as the role that her other of practice played in her learning. Nomi also showed a high degree of critical reflection on herself as a learner and on how learning related to work and life. As a student, she thus had clear expectations of herself. While she valued 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 Nomi spoke of her assessed writing. She acknowledged that such writing was argument and that:

you don’t write something like a story. You must argue … you say what you want to say and then you reflect it in the outline and look at it on the other side … you must reflect on your everyday life, your own experience.

However, it is also important for Nomi in her writing to reflect on past experience and to express her opinions.
maybe there is an argument which you must reflect on from what you are reading. You say 'I agree with this but in one way, I disagree.' You reflect again - as if you are talking to someone else. I then repeat it to myself until I can 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 (4A), mainly because I wanted to say what I think of RDP, not what other people think. It's where I could express myself about what's happened and what must be changed - to reorder 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 see the university as having value and the usefulness of the curriculums and transmission processes. She indicated her indication of the importance of written assessment as selling you 'right from wrong'.

In many ways, Nomu' exhibited most of the attributes of a 'critical reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983, 1987). In that role as a practitioner, she was continually undergoing 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 experiences about how this happened 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 the 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 Nomu', therefore, success on the certificate was made possible by a complex process of self-reflection and meaning-making through writing for assessment. The context of the course allowed her to build on her previous experiences, but she felt that she had to actively link her learning on the course with her community outside world(s). She also showed flexibility in her learning so that at times she might have felt on the margins of the course (for example, in group work), she was actively engaged in the process of border crossing and making meaning for herself as a learner (McMillan 1998). This emerges particularly 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 Nomu', on the whole, they seemed more positive experiences than for Yamini. However, what emerges clearly is that each of them found ways to take action and exhibit agency in their learning which allowed them to successfully negotiate potential boundaries to acquiring the discourse.

Conclusion

In exploring these two students' experiences of learning and writing, I have argued that the ways in which learner roles are constructed and the contexts within which learning takes place are crucial to understanding success. Success in turn needs to be understood as a process of boundary negotiation and meaning construction. For Yamini, 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 Nomu', this was in being able to reflect critically on both her life and student experience, integrating both. While this is a unique process for different learners, it is at the intersection of the individual and the social and through the construction of learner roles that meaning is made and success attained (McMillan 1997).

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

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

Note

1. DEG and DET are the abbreviations under which the education departments of the apartheid era were known. DEG was the Department of Education and Culture for 'coloured' students and DET the Department of Education and Training for 'African/black' students.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

In order to complete this assignment successfully, we expect you to:

* show that you understand the significance of the issue or question raised by the above quote;
* show that you are able to do some simple research, present your findings clearly, and interpret your findings;
* argue your own viewpoint on whether the above statement is correct or not;
* make a clear argument as to whether your research findings support your own views on the above statement, and if not, why not.

ASSIGNMENT 4A

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

EXPECTED OUTCOMES:

In order to complete this assignment successfully, we expect you to:

* show that you have a good understanding of the development needs of your community/workplace;
* demonstrate that you have some understanding of the underlying principles of the RDP;
* show the ability to interpret these principles in relation to the situation in your own community/workplace;
* put forward a clear argument of your view on the meaning of the RDP.

ASSIGNMENT 4B

'The RDP means all things to all people.'

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

CERTIFICATE IN ADULT EDUCATION, TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTUAL STUDIES (EMS10SW)

ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET

Name: Student Number:

ASSIGNMENT NO. & TITLE:

Date:

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

1. To help you establish your own patterns of learning, reflect and describe the process you followed to complete this assignment (this could include an estimate of the time it took, 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:

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

Elizabeth Hoodley-Maidment

Introduction

Professional education is an expanding area of university work. As professors such as nursing, physics and social science, by the end of the late 1980s and early 1990s, courses are being fundamentally restructured and there is a growing literature on the nature of professional education (Innes and Winter 1992; Ernst 1994). Most of this literature focuses on the development of professional competence and academic understanding how learning 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 the 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 – minimise the role of written assessment by using systems based on multiple-choice questions, oral examinations and practicals, but many professional programmes use assessment strategies based on those associated with underlying academic disciplines. The social sciences, for example, are core to a range of professional courses including nursing, teaching, social work and management. Social sciences are traditionally assessed through essays, experimental and project work presented in report form, and by means written examinations. When those disciplines are taught within professional...
Students also need opportunities to practice using the new academic language. This occurs through informal use of the discipline in class and in written work. Mode of study is important here. Full-time students obviously have greater opportunities to practice new discourses but may be learning in one or two 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 they complete fewer pieces of written work, so tend 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 to use the new discourses informally. Where students are following courses closely related to their professional work, however, close links between the two may help to alleviate this problem.

Social science approaches

Those of us whose interest in academic literacies is grounded in socialities and language teaching are familiar with the practical implications of linguistic approaches for teaching more generally. A second group of academic disciplines, which have been less influenced by a social practice-oriented approach to academic discourse, which draws on the work of the French school of Prasol (1972). This school focuses on how knowledge is 'framed' 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 as the student learns to reframe ideas in relation to concepts and theories and to use the language of the academic community appropriately.

In the social sciences the evidence to support the theories is taken from everyday life, requiring students to evidence everyday experience by creating a frame drawn from the concepts and ideas they have learnt in the course. (Norwood 1992). At some point students become aware of this change, described here by a student who had just completed the Open University course Social sciences foundation.

It was a whole new way of looking at everyday life, in as everyday object ever, to be described as concepts and/or situations and you had to get your brain into that mode of thinking to understand it. There were specific concepts within individual disciplines such as geography and political study. But the last stage of the course was all about drawing on these individual pools of ideas. It was exciting and fun knowing that you could just pick out from any pool you wished. That's where my confidence really came.

(Hoadley-Malone and Mercer 1980)

Occupational discourses

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

Reflecting on personal experience

In developing a theory of professional education, the caring professions have been strongly influenced by two major contributions of adult learning theory. Kolb's (1984) learning cycle focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and provides the main educational framework in the Open University courses considered. At the same time, these courses aim to teach reflective practice by drawing on Schön's (1983, 1987) model of the reflective practitioner. This is concerned with process learning in the development of professional competence. The basic premise of Schön's work is 'learning in action' in which the students carry out an action and then think consciously about it. Through 'reflection' they gradually learn to refine problems and solutions within the discourse of the profession. As there are interesting parallels between Schön's ideas and the Froebel-based approach to discourse outlined above, it is worth considering how this may inform the development of academic literacies.

Schön's theory is rooted in the concept of the 'reflective dialogue' taught in face-to-face teaching situations such as workplace workshops. He describes in detail the, sometimes cosmic, conversations that take place between teachers and students while the student is engaged in practising a professional skill, for example drawing an architectural ground plan, in a setting where the teaching arts are much richer than imparted knowledge. This kind of teaching is familiar to most of us. It is the basis of adult education teaching in hobby classes such as arts and crafts, sports coaching, science laboratory work and many other aspects of teaching arts as much richer than imparted knowledge. This kind of teaching is familiar to most of us. It is the basis of adult education teaching in hobby classes such as arts and crafts, sports coaching, science laboratory work and many other aspects of teaching arts as much richer than imparted knowledge.

The theory emphasizes communication, although Schön himself does not address the role of written communication. He describes the student-teacher dialogue as having a number of feedback loops. The 'language' of these dialogues may not consist solely of spoken or written words, however. In architecture, for example, there is a combination of visual language (drawing of ground plans, elevation 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 work. A dialogue with a mentor or a piece of practical work is likely to start with a problem. Students ask for help from the mentor because they are stuck and a conversation occurs which proceeds through questions and answers accompanied by drawing, demonstration or musical performance. The conversation provides opportunities to practise the language of the profession and to refine the professional knowledge appropriately.

Although popular, the reflective practitioner model has been heavily criticized (Larssen 1993). (Slavin 1990). (Kolb 1995). (Keating 1995). Students are focused on Schön's overload in the creative aspects of professional development and are 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 and skilled behaviour, not, however, concerned in this topic with the role of language or communication in professional learning. If we turn to the way in which students develop the discourse to communicate professionally, there are no other theories with Schön's theory that can be used to help students develop their own emotional maturity and confidence in contributing to the discourse.

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 mentor or novice occupies a small proportion of time - perhaps five minutes in a two-hour session. In-between times students get on with their own work: they practise the skills and ask for help when they get stuck. More importantly, they interact with other students: they wander round the room looking at other people's work by observing what others are doing, they discuss their work and provide help for each other, and they learn by overhearing the dialogue between the tutor and other students. In other words, learning - the 'practicable' of a 'practitioners' Schön describes a social discourse in which students are part of a collective experience which enables them both to use the discourse and apply it directly to practice, in a sheltered situation. An analysis of work-based learning settings would doubtless show similar patterns.

The second failure relates to the particular role of communication in the classroom. Here communication is not simply for talking about practice but also a vital way of carrying out practice. (The same is true of teaching). Students learn from the feedback on their communicative skills in the same way that a student architect needs feedback on his drawing skills. 'Teaching' is largely done on his use of surgical instruments. In face-to-face teaching this is often done through videotaped role plays. However, writing.

(Academic attitudes to writing in professional education

The School of Health and Social Welfare at the Open University has developed its courses for professionals in the health and social care fields using the distance-learning model originally developed by the Open University for its undergraduate programmes. This uses a core of textbook-based consisting of course workbooks which encourage active learning through problem-solving activities, supplemented by 'readers' containing academic papers, videos and audiotapes. The School emphasizes the value of a wide range of people working in the fields of health and social welfare rather than at one professional group, and has successfully developed a number of self-contained courses and, more recently, diplomas for this teaching. The courses are designed to develop professional competence through reflective thought, not to practice writing as preparation for academic assessment.

One of the main features of the courses is the opportunity for students to draw on their personal and work experience both in understanding academic concepts and terms and in actually undertaking written assignments. There is, however, a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that students have difficulty in using their own language in their assignments. One may partly be explained by the fact that courses were developed initially at an academic level equivalent to second-year university study (socialised second-course students) but taken by many students who were new to university study. Most students revert because the courses are work-related and enable them to link academic learning to their professional lives. However, this raises questions as to how the academic writing students are asked to complete relates to their work experience and professional development and training. The demands and assessments of the assessment strategy, because it was taken from that of the originally more traditional undergraduate programme, did not take into account the starting point for this group of students.

In 1995 the School of Health and Social Welfare began preliminary work on the development of an introductory course for first-year undergraduate...
level. There was a lot of informal discussion among academics as to the links between traditional academic assessment and work-based learning. There was a feeling among academics that students with no previous experience of university study failed assignments on the School’s existing courses because they lacked the ability to write ‘academically,’ but it was difficult to ascertain what lecturers meant by this. Therefore, they decided to carry out a small-scale survey on academic writing and the use of personal experience in the School’s existing second-year courses. It was particularly interesting to them because students were re-sitting assignments and examinations regarding the development of academic writing and its relationship to the assessment strategy in unsatisfactory practice-related courses. The survey was carried out at the end of the 1995 academic year so that respondents were able to draw on the examinations and projects they had just marked when responding.

At that time the School offered eight second-year courses, each worth 30 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points. All the courses had a workload of approximately 6–8 hours a week over a 30-week teaching year, during which students completed four written assignments. The assignments varied, but most courses offered for three essays and one longer piece of work (an essay or project) which provided an opportunity for students to undertake a small investigation related to their job, or alternatively to pursue a topic through library research. This longer piece varied in size between 1000 and 4000 words. There was also a need for little common among staff as to the value of projects, other than that they were an opportunity for students to pursue their personal experience and relate it to the academic concepts and theories taught on the courses, and there was also some confusion over the difference between projects and ‘extended’ essays.

Social scientists responsible for the overall co-ordination of individual courses (the School offered eight at the time) completed a questionnaire, designed to elicit their views of the students’ strengths and weaknesses in relation to academic writing. The respondents were people with academic expertise in social sciences and professional expertise in health and social care: nine of them described themselves as having expertise in academic literacy although, like the majority of Open University teachers, they had experience of working with mature students who needed support in this area.

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

The lecturers were also asked to rate different types of written work in order of importance as they teach on a threepoint scale from very important to very important, and this revealed that academic argument was considered to be the most important form of writing, closely followed by the ability to draw on personal (including work) experience in assignments – the latter being seen as either ‘very important’ or ‘important’. In most cases there was an assumption that students understood what was expected when asked to contribute to work experience and write about it.

Five said that students had particular problems with the reflective project. The weaknesses were given as a failure to understand the need to analyse, together with a lack of understanding of the handling and interpretation of data. The latter is not, strictly speaking, an academic writing skill, but in a distance-learning course the only way students can indicate that they have learnt research skills is through their written work.

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

- we attract people direct from the field. They are often steeped in practice, but unused to academic study and writing.
- the questionnaire provided space for additional comments. Detailed comments were made which showed that many concerns were common ones. Comments such as the following were typical:
  - have difficulty in using personal experience in an appropriate way (as a vehicle to organise course themes and issues, etc.)
  - reflect on own experiences as a means to illustrate a point of argument rather than just ‘tell the page’.

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

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

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

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

Issues raised in the survey

Although the questionnaire was brief and relatively unstructured, the results produced were valuable for the common concerns that they revealed. The importance these academics gave to the development of skills in expressing academic argument reflects the centrality of written academic argument to teaching in the UK university system. In social sciences (and arts and humanities), essays, examining academic arguments are regarded as the best way of judging whether a student has understood the concepts and issues of a course and developed higher-order cognitive skills such as analytic and synthetic. At the same time it has been shown that knowledge and argument are differentiated and constructed by different disciplines, and that ‘new’ disciplines related to professions such as nursing also have individual characteristics (Bowers and Wison 1993). In professional education the emphasis on traditional forms of academic writing such as the development of interpretative and critical terms of competence. 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 a range of different dimensions. The way we normally talk or write about personal experience it 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 mixing the (narrative) experience into a form which illustrates academic argument based on abstract concepts, issues and theories. One way to teach this is to begin with forms which students feel 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 write about this experience in narrative form initially, while at a later point, for example in a dissertation, they have the chance to develop 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 engage in practice and theory in a context where the assessment strategy is based on traditional academic measures. In addition, it is important to consider the different features of support offered to learning and how these may affect students’ development as academic writers. Mitchell (1995), writing about the development of academic argument, says that the basis of most learning in the UK education system is spoken language. This is seen as ‘open and transformative’ while written language is ‘the aim of closure: the assignment which marks the end of a period of study’ (Mitchell 1995: 135). Spoken language provides opportunities for students to try things out, for most students this means discussing concepts and issues, both inside class and informally. Academic discourse is learnt within a social and collective setting, involving both tutor-student and student-student interaction. The importance of spoken language in the development of writing as adult students is well documented at levels from basic education (Benson 1995b) and return to learning (Gardiner 1985) to language support for university students (Clerk and Bannan 1992).

In the Open University, as in most distance-learning institutions, not only is the bulk of teaching material in written form, but so is the support system. Tutorials are optional and the main form of communication between students and tutors is a highly sophisticated form of written exchanges. The interaction between the student and the tutor is mediated by written text produced by the student and read by the tutor. As such, the Open University is an excellent example of how conventional systems of teaching and learning, including those used to support distance learning, can lead to the development of skills and classroom practices that are not only different from, but may conflict with, those used in traditional classrooms and schools. In this way the use of spoken language is central to both the learning process and the way in which students are taught to write. The importance of spoken language in the development of understanding and the development of writing skills is highlighted, and the extent to which these are supported by university teaching is a significant issue.
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 literacy, by building on those they already have, may mean re-hinging the academic genres in which they are being asked to write early in the course. It also means making sure that students recognize where an academic task such as a project may differ from projects they have done elsewhere. For example, it is not always clear to students how projects differ from essays. Open University students receive assignment briefs containing guidance on completing the written assessments. These often refer to ‘arguments’ while at the same time failing to say explicitly that projects must relate the data collected to the issues and concepts presented in the course. Since many professional students are familiar with descriptive reports and probably write them regularly themselves, they may feel that the only conclusions they have to reach are those drawn from the data themselves. In other words, they approach an academic assignment in the way they would prepare a report for a case conference, without realizing the difference in both discourse and genre.

Another issue which arises in health and social care courses is how students indicate that they have understood the value base of a course. Equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practice are central to study in the caring professions. Guidelines are frequently laid down by professional bodies. For example, in the case of the Society of Midwives and Midwifery Welfare of England, The ‘Disability’ disabled students’ programme, which promotes a model of disability expressed through a very specific discourse, is based on a vision of equal opportunity. It is 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 is also apparent that many of them had understood only at the surface level (Morgan 1995) because when asked to illustrate their answers from their experience they were unable to do so. In other words, the relationship between reflection, the issues of breadth 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 are a need to develop systems for part-time and distance-learning courses which substitute for the kind of communication experienced in the workplace where students can begin to refocus their experience using the discourse as a lens for future action, and an assessed assignment. This should begin with more explicit guidance 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 practice by providing a ‘privileged’ 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, noting experiences and using questionnaires as frameworks for the analysis of critical incidents can all provide opportunities to practice academic discourse and establish feedback loops between academic concepts and professional practice. Course designers must then consider how the assessment strategy can best evaluate the type of learning, choosing methods of assessment for their ability to link theory and practice, rather than simply using already existing methods which suit institutional systems and regulations.

Finally, 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 in 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 ‘graduateability’ 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 concurred 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 (Riener 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 realizable within systems designed for academic learning. Courses such as those I have described bring together two approaches to learning: ‘traditional’ academic learning of theoretical academic knowledge and ‘reflection in action’ whereby the doing informs and is informed by the learning. The first is concerned with developing a range of higher-order cognitive skills such as analysis and synthesis, while the latter focuses on improved performance.
Issues and questions framing the research

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

The MA has developed a reputation for being both intellectually challenging and professionally relevant:

- intellectually challenging because you will be asked to address complex issues and come to terms with advanced literature;
- professionally relevant because you will be encouraged constantly to identify the significance of your study for your everyday work and concerns.

This description neatly encapsulates the two traditions, or 'orders of discourse' (Foucault 1972; Etchilagary 1989), which I would argue are MA programmes – and indeed many MA programmes in education – attempt to incorporate. The first of these places particular value on the traditional intellectual competences of 'the academy', at least in the humanities and social sciences: the construction of a coherent argument, appropriate use of evidence, the capacity to write clearly and concisely, and on so on. The latter places particular value on aspects of professional development typically associated with being the sort of teacher or student you are one's practice, and upon the implications of that reflection for changing practice: the ability to demonstrate the professional competence of one's learning, and the need to think the results of study to professional competence and practical realities. Whether, and how, these competing discourses can ultimately be reconciled within a single programme of study was one of the main issues in the research. A key assumption underpinning the research was that it is within the 'literary practices' associated with these courses – and especially in the writing requirements – that these two orders of discourse are most acutely focused.

Most teachers studying within an MA programme are doing so as at least in part for professional reasons. Moreover, the courses are at least in part about their professional work. Consequently teachers approach the courses – not unreasonably – with the expectation that their professional experience will provide them with a foundation of resources needed in order to produce assignments and thereby successfully fulfill assessment requirements. One of the starting points for the research was an observation that many teachers studying within the MA programme experienced considerable confusion over the expectations they were attempting to meet, with respect to writing, sometimes leading to fraught conflicts with their tutors. They experimented, but despite the fact that Open University course materials are generally considered to be exceptional in the extent to which they make such expectations explicit. I suspected that this confusion was due in part to a conflation of professional discourses and academic discourses in the way writing tasks were described, coupled with a lack of explicitness about the way in which students are expected to negotiate these ways of using language.

Starting points and frames for analysis

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

With respect to the field of academic literacy, the project is located within, and seeks to make a contribution to, a growing area of research into aspects of academic writing in higher education based on a 'critical' perspective on discourse and literacy practices, or what Lea and Street (Chapter 2 of this volume) call an 'academic literacies' model. Within this perspective, academic writing is conceptualized as a set of social practices embedded in networks of culture and power, rather than seeing academic writing as a transparent medium for representing knowledge, or as a set of rules to which students need to accommodate, this perspective views academic institutions as sites of power, and academic writing as a point where power is 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 studying, with the authority and control of the institution (Bozivch 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, glance to the Edney'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. A lot of work has been done in this area, which is essentially concerned with the relationship between training, conceptual understanding, and professional practice (see Schlech 1985; 1987; Rolke 1984; and Ernst 1994). It is from this body of work that such widely used terms as 'reflective practice' have derived. A useful approach to the study of this area is that of a critical professional ethic, or 'professional ethics' (Beck 1998). This approach seeks to demonstrate how the study of the ways in which professional knowledge is encoded in language (Ginnsen et al. 1997), but apparently none has examined the effects of written language which have become associated with professional training. My starting point is that it is in the language practices, the ways teachers are required to present assignments, that some place greater weight upon students' understanding and analysis of issues and concepts discussed in the course materials. Some require students to take a formal final examination, and all of them contain some element of research.

Analysis of specifications for written assignments

Most of the chapter reports on the results of one of the main strands in the research project – that being an analysis of the specifications for written assignments in the MA's MA in Education programme. This involved a careful analysis of each assignment booklet for the MA 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 additional advice on writing assignments for the module, as well as guidance notes on each question which aim to help the students (and indeed the tutor) to understand what they assignment expects them to do. The specifications are standard for every student taking the course, no matter where in the world they live; the role of the tutor is therefore to interpret and mediate these requirements rather than to set questions themselves.

Inventory of types of writing across the programme

One element of my research involved compiling an 'inventory' of the types of writing required across the MA programme by analysing the assignment sections in the MA's MA in Education programme. This required an analysis of over 100 specifications for written assignments across the programme.

The analysis revealed that, regardless of the three modules a student chooses to study, they will be expected to produce a wide range of types of writing. Table 11.2 is a list of the types of writing required in the MA programme, and it is not exhaustive. The inventory lists typical styles of writing across the programme. However, not the mention every style, but rather those that are common across the programme. Nevertheless, with such a broad range of writing types across the programme – and with some students only encountering certain genre categories once or
Text analysis of individual assignment specifications

Following the 'inversion' 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. Warnings in which the questions appear to 'position' students with respect to ideas in the course.
4. Warnings of impatience.

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. Each 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 03 are conventional essay questions.

Avoid being simply descriptive or prescriptive. This is an MA course, which demands a critical analysis as well as a display of understanding of the course material. A wiring 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 acknowledgment 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 ESS8 assignments are reports on management rather than academic essays. We have found from past experience that some students do not achieve as high a grade as they might have, had they appreciated the differences between 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 lampooning 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 differs from the expectations for ESS8, 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 work.
experience when answering the question or completing the task assigned. This implies that even though it should not be so, they identify the implications of their argument or analysis for their professional work. 

Analyzing instances of this feature was seen as one way of examining the ways in which professional and mundane traditions are played through by 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 were expected to represent their professional work when setting assignments. In some modules (notably ‘Education’, ‘Training, and Employability’, ‘Child Development’, ‘Language and Literature’, and ‘Gender Issues in Education’) students are expected to keep a minimum amount of discussion of professional circumstances, or of the professional development achieved as a result of study—though no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically. The examples of essay-style questions given in Table 11.3 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 should be expected to, or even to, draw upon their professional experience as teachers in order to attempt, and succeed at, the writing task. Indeed, for most modules in this category there is an implication that students would be penalized if they include more than a passing reference to their professional work when constructing their assignments.

In steps 4–5 you are asked to provide a critical review of the mentoring programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the institution, the mentoring process and your own professional development.

In step 3 you are asked to examine the concept of the ‘mentoring school’ and to explore the potential for mentoring in other staff development processes within your institution.

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

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Table 11.3 Open University MA in Education: examples of essay-style questions

From 1987, Assignment 01, Question 1

Examine the view that since the economic crises of the 1970s, the political and economic agenda for education and training has been dominated by economic imperatives in which a prime objective has been to increase political control over educational practice and institutions. What would you say have been the main consequences of this policy for the development of vocational education and training?

From 1988, Assignment 01, Question 5

How does this definition of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ help us to understand the way that masculinized masculinities and femininity are constructed?

From 1989, Assignment 02, Question 1

Critically evaluate the contribution that Dorn’s book, The legibility of social understanding, has made to our understanding of child development and how to promote it.

From 1987, Assignment 03, Question 1

‘A discourse of adult learning encourages leisure opportunities, education and training and thus may with little distinction between them.’ Critically assess this conclusion and the consequences for the provision of learning opportunities for adults.

The eight remaining modules lie somewhere between these two poles on the professional-academic continuum. This aspect of the analysis clearly shows that, as students move from one module to another, they are required to negotiate possible discontinuities in the way they think about their subject and their studies to their professional work when setting assignments, and that some shifts are left almost entirely unacknowledged in the assignment briefs.

Way in which the positions appear to ‘linger’ students’ attitude to data in the course

Of interest here was the use of certain discursive devices (that is, specific features of discourse that contribute to its social function) which work within assignment specifications to position students with respect to ideas in the text, to the institution, the module and to the student’s own personal or professional response to them is not strictly warrantable as an outcome. Other courses seemed implicitly to expect the student to position themselves at the very heart of the course: in such courses the student seemed to be expected to write themselves— and, in particular, their personal and professional development—in the assignment, almost as the ‘main character’. Indeed, most courses implicitly contained some elements of both of these

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Table 11.4 A selection of imperatives taken from assignment specifications

Evaluate Justify

Critically evaluate Construct a conceptual

Annotate Categorise

Analyse Describe

Critically appraise Give a brief description

Examine Describe and analyse

Critically examine Write a critical account

Critically discuss Reflect on

Critically reflect on Outline

modules. All modules were very similar, however, in their obviousness to define these imperatives. With one or two exceptions, the course team’s idea was to use these imperatives to give an idea of how to go about following such instructions is not made explicit, and yet these imperatives are often represented as being indicative of a kind of writing task the student is expected to undertake. This remarkable range of instructions provides clear evidence of the taken-for-grantedness with which academic terms approach the task of preparing assignments, as well as the complicity of the ‘code’ which is used to construct 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 terms, the terms are semantically interchangeable, whereas a conscientious student might reasonably seek to distinguish the meanings of these different key terms.

Discussion

Space constraints do not permit a discussion here of the other strands of the research project, such as the comparisons between student and tutor modules 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 briefs for the modules in the OU’s MA programme, is informative to some extent by promulgating findings from these other research strands.

These analyses of the assignment briefs raise a number of important questions, which extend well beyond the superficial issue of inadequate specificity in setting out the requirements for students’ writing. The sections identified by this analysis appear to reveal a deep confusion within the programme at the level of epistemological. There is clearly no reference made to the various strands of the programme about the professional knowledge that
at postgraduate level were negotiating a transition between one culture (schoolteaching) and another (academic research and scholarship). These transitions of academic practice have persisted, despite the fundamental changes that have taken place in the professional and personal circumstances within which most people work towards their degrees in education. This process appears to be facilitated by the fact that many of the literary practices comprising MA in Education courses have evolved from traditional academic disciplines, mainly in the social sciences, at undergraduate level. One possibility is that these practices have simply reproduced themselves within universities, thus making the university community to consider a plot the kinds of knowledge which could and should be ascertainable within such programmes, and in to develop forms of seeing which facilitate the acquisition of such knowledge. Indeed, it maybe that conventional academic genres of writing serve to constrain teachers’ abilities to construct professional knowledge for themselves.

Implications for theory

Although the analysis is still at an early stage, the project has already begun to have an impact on and influence the theoretical understanding of academic literacy practices, introduced at the beginning of this chapter (and more fully in the Editors’ Introduction to this volume), and at the same time 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 encouraged or implicitly required to develop professional knowledge, demonstrate that this is a fruitful explanatory framework for research of this kind.

Implications for practice

At this stage of the research, two main implications for practice are suggested by the analysis. The first is the need for a more explicit and systematic approach for helping students to identify and to critique the kinds of expectations they are expected to fulfill in relation to written assignments. The analysis of types of specifications written assignments in this chapter demonstrate the need for some overarching framework and language to help students to negotiate the kinds of writing expected of them within MA modules. An adaptation of Fitzpatrick’s (1989) approach to critical genre 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 interviews with students reinforces this finding: none of the students interviewed

appeared to have a ‘metatraduction’ for discussing vital aspects of academic writing. Terms such as ‘argument’, ‘critical’ and ‘analysis’, which were often used in course materials and by their tutors in feedback, were still largely mysterious to them. This problem might be especially acute for those students who do not bring to their study of these courses the particular forms of cultural capital and Pytlick (1970) which enable other students quickly to identify the discursive ground rules operating within their courses and to produce forms of writing which suit the ground rules. Nevertheless, it is an emergent with which all students on such programmes could potentially benefit.

The second implication for practice is the need for a robust and collaborative debate among academic staff about the most appropriate forms of writing for helping teachers to develop professional knowledge within master-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 support for professional learning, and to problematize the assumptions about academic writing which underlie our advice to students and our work with fellow tutors.

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