Student Writing in Higher Education: New Contexts

Edited Book

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Editors’ Introduction

Mary R. Lea and Barry Sierer

In this collection we have brought together 11 articles written by practitioner-researchers working in a range of international university settings. Our main aim has been to bring the attention of fellow university teachers some of the exciting work currently being done in the areas of student learning and academic literacy, within what we are calling neo-academic discipline, that is, emerging and evolving within traditional academic disciplines (for example, writing journals in anthropology, and ‘reflection writing’ and ‘empathetic writing’ in a number of subjects). We feel that the work emerging from these new concerns 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 innovations arising from the contributions in this 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 their analyses the practical implications for teaching and learning activities.

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

Background

The developing research area of student writing in higher education is a highly topical one for two major reasons. Increasingly, in many countries, universities are becoming subjected to ‘teaching quality 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 (Higher Education Funding Council for England) has resulted in a national framework for the training of university lecturers in aspects of teaching and learning, leading to formal accreditation. We anticipate that issues of student writing and assessment will feature prominently in these training programmes.

At the same time, student intake and curriculum provision in universities are changing rapidly. As a result, students are coming from an increasingly wide range of educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to study in a number of diverse learning contexts which often no longer reflect traditional academic subject boundaries with their attendant values and norms. Additionally, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of lifelong learning and the necessity for universities to adapt their provision to make it possible for learners to enter higher education for training and ret raining 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 1996; Lankshear 1997) which is embodied in the values, relationships and institutional discourses constituting the cultures of academic disciplines in higher education. The social practice perspective adopted by all the contributors reflects an important conceptual shift in the study of student writing in higher education. Much of the existing work in this area approaches student writing from an essentially ‘skills-based’ perspective. That is, writing in higher education is assumed to be a competence which, once acquired, enables students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in virtually any context. The qualities of ‘good writing’ are assumed to be self-evident, and largely a matter of learning and mastering universal rules of, for example, grammar, usage and text organisation. Explanations for students who experience problems with writing tend to locate the problem as a deficit in the student rather than question the way in which the grounding of academic writing becomes established and negotiated in particular academic contexts. This traditional ‘skills-based’ approach is manifest most clearly in the growing tendency to consign the teaching of writing to marginal ‘study skills’ and ‘learning support’ units, raising strongly for many students demands to be more traditional. The papers in this collection consider what it means to take a contrasting approach and to address the relationship between learning and writing in mainstream curriculum delivery.

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

- the expansion of student numbers in higher education institutions;
- the opening up of new routes into university study;
- the increasing linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of students, in part due to the above two factors;
- the move away from curriculum delivery within clearly defined academic disciplines to interdisciplinary courses;
- the growth of vocationally oriented programmes, 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 in place these fundamental contextual factors at the heart of research into student writing, whereas the ‘skills-based’ perspective would view them as background (at best) and irrelevant (at worst).

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

- The changing context in higher education forms an integral feature of setting and assessment practices, rather than mere background.
- To understand what 'counts' as 'good writing' in higher education requires an understanding of the culture of individual academic disciplines - their
An overview of the chapters in this collection

The chapters we have commissioned for this volume represent the result of careful research on our part into current trends and developments in the field of academic literacy. It is our objective to integrate the work of the contributors to this volume with the research and experience we have as editors of the journal and through our participation in practitioner and researcher networks in the UK and abroad, where we have learned about new approaches to teaching writing in higher education. We felt that this work was extremely interesting in its own right, and also that it would be of great value to the world of academia and beyond.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which contains a number of chapters:

Part I: Academic Writing

This part focuses on the challenges of writing in higher education, including the importance of developing effective writing skills and strategies for students. It includes contributions from a range of experts in the field, including academics, researchers, and practitioners.

Part II: Teaching Writing

This part explores the role of the writing teacher and how to support students in developing their writing skills. It includes chapters on the importance of feedback, the use of technology in teaching writing, and the role of scaffolding in helping students develop their writing abilities.

Part III: Research on Academic Writing

This part contains research-based chapters that explore the latest developments in the field of academic writing. It includes contributions from researchers in a variety of disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, and education.

Overall, this book offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of academic writing in higher education and provides valuable insights into the best practices and strategies for supporting students in their development as writers.
Writing and vocationally oriented study in universities: are the 'old' genres up to the job?

Studying. His analysis draws upon interviews with nursing students and teaching staff, and upon examples of students' written assignments. He argues that "[a]lmost no concept like 'writing position' cannot be fully or nicely underdressed without a disciplinary awareness of its status in the university and what counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the nature of internal and external conflict, as realized 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 discussions in Chapter 5 of the tension between practical (creative) work in the university and the relentless downward pressure to conform to conventional models of academic writing. In this sense, their analysis helps to illuminate the broader question of whether the students or the academic discipline are expected to develop through their studies, and the forms and styles of academic writing available to them for display and evaluation. To be sure, there is an increasing importance for coursework on academic writing, about which they often feel less confident.

In Chapter 7, Mark Bower examines technical writers in the specific context of the postgraduate initial training of schoolteachers. She compares the writing styles of students' assignments within two sets of assessment arrangements - before 1992, when a considerable amount of postgraduate teaching was based in the university; and after 1992, when postgraduate teaching became located almost exclusively in schools. She concludes that, although the specification for teacher trainers' written assignments in the post-1992 arrangements appeared to give considerable flexibility to the way students structured their writing, and addressed the relationship between theory and practice, the most successful of these students organized their writing using the traditional academic essay as the model. On the other hand, the assessment specifications for students' assignments within the post-1992 arrangements formally required teachers to discourse the linkages between theory and practice, but their assignments tended to evaluate the relevance of theory to a practical context, and generally through the practical perspectives of the staff in their placement institutions.

In Chapter 8, Simon Parode examines a writing task that represents an attempt to simulate a form of professional writing regularly produced in the workplace. Modern war acquisition frequently involves a conflict - in this case an environmental impact assessment. His analysis focuses on the concept of 'attributions,' by which he means the kinds of significance modern people are attached to a particular activity in relation to their learning and professional acumen. He shows how students' apparent errors in their construction of the text are not just a matter of writing, but a means to an end in sustaining their confidence in the educational context in which the assignment was constructed, rather than to problems that are in fact inherent in the professional context which their position as the apparently 'natural' providers of professional training. One way that universities have historically consulted such positions is by engaging their academic expertise. The authors explore some of the tensions that exist for student writers in these new contexts as they engage with forms of writing which are not necessarily familiar. For them, the academic 'responsibility' of their work by inculcating the paradigms of a 'disciplinary' ethos (Chancellor, 1999), Times Higher Educational Supplement, 15 January 1999), at the same time that pressure is brought to bear by policymakers and some elements of the public to enhance the practical relevance of the courses on offer. (Nine teachers 'pull out to speed' on word life', Times Higher Educational Supplement, 22 January 1999).

These trends carry with them significant implications for student writing and learning. For example, students engaged in vocational training might be expected to acquaint themselves with the specialized professional discourses of the workplace they are preparing to enter, and at the same time be expected to demonstrate such knowledge and understanding by means of 'academic' genres, thus blurring the language-learning demands. And for professionals entering (or returning to) universities for postgraduate or in-service education and training, there may now be professional tensions between their existing professional expertise and their studies with professional discourses, and the more academically oriented discourses and written genres they are expected to control in order to complete their studies successfully. Neither the literature on professional discourses (see, for example, Commoner et al., 1997), nor on professional knowledge and competence (see, for example, Ernst, 1991) has given adequate attention to the role played by the genres of academic writing, privileged by universities in their courses for professional groups, in shaping such discourses and knowledge.

With these issues in mind, it is clear that vocationally oriented study in universities consumes one of the most significant new contexts for student writing considered by this volume; since it is here to it is possible to examine the interrelationships between:

- new routes in the higher education sector;
- systems between 'research-led' and 'academic' learning;
- new forms of university work rising for academic status and recognition;
- systems between professional/workplace discourse and academic discourses;
- tensions between 'academic' erudite genres of academic writing and new styles of writing developed to support the acquisition and consolidation of professional knowledge.

Several of the chapters in this collection address issues surrounding writing and vocationally oriented study in universities. In Chapter 1, Mike Bamford examines the ways in which the process of 'disciplinization' takes place in 'practice-based' university work, using nursing as the main case.
the role of facilitators, with students assuming more control over their interpretation of what counts as valid academic knowledge.

Lea and Sierer see issues of identity and personalization as central to their model of academic literacy which recognizes the value of the beliefs and assumptions about writing and knowledge that students bring to the academy. As both Sierer and McMillan illustrate in their chapters, this is of particular importance in relation to adult learners and is more so than for established professionals. Sierer considers the kind of problems posed for professional teachers who can find themselves positioned as novices by the university. This positioning conflicts with both the professional experience that they bring with them to their studies and with their professional purposes for studying. Sierer explores how the writing requirements of their course position them not as developing professionals but as novice academics. Dance students may feel comfortable with their own creative practices. However, as Mitchell and her colleagues explore in Chapter 5, tensions and conflicts arise when students are required to write within the context of their course. The authors draw here on Hart's model of personal identity formation in offering a socially oriented explanation for the choreographies and the writing tasks. One of the ideas that they explore in this choreography is the student's desire 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 contributions to this volume illustrate repeatedly that in their writing academic knowledge is not merely taken up by students and transmitted back to their tutors through the process of assessment. Instead, students in both new and established disciplines 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 diffuse compendium of objects, methods, rules, definitions, techniques and tools... In addition he must be in control of specific field constraints, 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 emphasize one set of textual elements, a literary historian another, and the essays produced will contain these differences. (Ball et al. 1990: 157)

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

A basic assumption is that, in order to understand the problematic of the novice writer, we need to understand the disciplinary contexts within which they are required to write, or more specifically the disciplines they are writing themselves into. But I would also like you to keep in your mind's eye the image of the harassed first-year nursing student, hurrying from lecture to tutorial, backpack full of photocopied journal articles, notes and guidelines for an essay on the sociology of nursing, a clinical report, a case study, a reflective journal. They are certainly living disciplinary and textual heterogeneity.
Recent advances in the understanding of disciplines and disciplinary
(see Messer-Davidow et al. 1995) emphasize that, rather than being
homogeneous and discrete communities, academic disciplines are radic-
ally heterogeneous and constituted in difference. Nowhere is this more
apparent than in the current ‘empiricism-based’ disciplines of the next
university. Disciplinary heterogeneity and difference have significant
implications for student academic writers who can be understood as writing
themselves into a ‘disciplinary politics’, by which I mean the internal
tensions and conflicts over issues such as what counts as knowledge, how
should be written in the curriculum and how it should be valued, where
boundaries within and between disciplines should be drawn. Students are
learning to take up writing positions in the contest 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, draw-
ning out implications for both research and pedagogy in academic literacies.

I will begin by identifying three perspectives on the theorization of
academic writing. For the first, a ‘skill-based’ approach to the teaching of
academic writing, assumes that there is a general set of skills and strategies
that could be taught and then applied in particular disciplinary contexts.
The second, ‘contextual’, linguistic approach assumes a relatively homogeneous
discipline, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. The third,
‘practice-based’, approach proposed here investigates student writing as both
practice and an achievement of a discipline’s ‘community’. Where
the disciplinary positions are conflicting, overlapping or indeed blurred,
the student academic writer will be working within the disciplinary politics
that is produced. Lea 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 to new
and emergent disciplines, focusing in particular on the ways in which the
disciplinary practices are ‘represented’ and ‘embody’ in the written work
(written as understood both as product and process) and the ways in which
students learn to become literate and proficient in these new writing positions in text.
A concept like ‘writing position’ cannot be fully or richly understood with-
out an analysis of the various writing practices of what counts as knowledge and what
counts as an authoritative disciplinary position, and this includes the aware-
ness of the internal diversity and conflict, as realised in the politics of
the discipline.

Where does this leave the student writer? In the concluding section of
this chapter I will argue that new writing pedagogy must take into account
the concerns of disciplinary, disciplinarisation and consequent writing posi-
tions central – in other words, as Griffiths (quoted in Klein 1993) suggests, we
must ‘teach the curriculum’.

Academic writing, disciplinarisation and difference

So far I have suggested the need to move away from a generic, skill-based
approach to understanding academic writing in two directions, first in mak-
ing use of the resources of linguistic analysis to capture the specific features
of the language used in different disciplines, and second in problematizing
the practicalities of the discipline itself.

Ball et al (1991: 342), quoted at the beginning of this chapter, focus on the
diversity within disciplines as well as across them, a point that is picked up
and expanded by Goggin (1995: 12):

What complicates research and pedagogy in writing in the disciplines is how
different epistemological assumptions about writing exist within and across
disciplines, but also within disciplines. As Kenneth Runcie (1987: 333)
has suggested, though institutional boundaries conventionally demarcate
classes of academics, the situation is actually more complicated. There
is diversity within disciplines as different types of professionals exist side
by side in the same writing. Runcie’s argument is supported by Scott
and Kirsche’s (1992) study of the inquiry processes of members from
social sciences, natural sciences, and the humanities. Their study shows
that the process of academic inquiry is dynamic, shifting along personal
and disciplinary lines, with individual scholars and researchers often
crossing disciplinary boundaries to pursue their research questions (cf.
Klein 1993). These kinds of lateral moves across fields account in part
for the growing diversity within fields.

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

New and emerging disciplinary areas

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

New and emerging areas typically draw on a range of disciplines. Let us
take adult education as an example. The adult education theorist
e.g. Goffman (1973) socializes one range of disciplines, including sociol-
ogy, psychology, geography, philosophy and economics, which impact on educa-
tion as a field of study. Knowledge from these disciplines is, of course, not
imported raw but ‘recontextualised’, in Bernstein’s (1970) sense. Within
adult education as a field of study there are different schools of thought,
with different versions of what counts as knowledge, and even the board-
aries of the field (Fiske 1995: 14). These involve major epistemological
cleavages, for example, around positivist, interpretive and post-positivist
accounts of knowledge and action. All of this adds up to the disciplinary
terrain on to which the student adult educator is introduced. To para-
phrase Ball et al, where the adult education student is asked ‘to write like an
adult educator’ this will be the terrain she/he will learn to inhabit. By
mapping out the major dimensions of this terrain, we can develop an account
of the disciplinary politics which the student is setting him/herself into.

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

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

Nursing education: a case study

One of the significant issues in nursing education has been the shift, over
the last decade or so, from a ‘practitioner-centred’ to a ‘professionalised’ con-
ception of nursing (see Gray and Pratt 1989, 1995). This has coincided
with the shift of nursing training/education out of the hospitals and into
the universities. One aspect of the disciplinary politics of nursing is precisely
this shift from practice-centred to professionalised concepts of nursing.

Another tension which is central to nursing education is that between prac-
tical knowledge and theorised knowledge. Like adult education, nursing
draws on a heterogeneous disciplinary base, most strikingly in the contrast
between the science-based, clinical subjects and the ethical subjects. Under-
lying these subjects are very different conceptions of what counts as
knowledge, the clinical subjects being underpinned by the positivist scient-
ist paradigm, the ethical subjects by an interpretative or post-postion pers-
pective on what counts as knowledge. The shift into academic
training/education produces in turn processes of disciplinisation, where
nursing is purged to constitute itself as a distinct and disciplined discourse (again
there are interesting parallels with adult education as a field of study.) As Webb
(1992: 567) suggests:

Three perspectives on academic writing

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

The skill-based approach draws on the resources of linguistic analysis, in
particular register (see Halliday and Martin 1993) and genre studies (Swales,
1990; Freedman and Mohave 1994), to understand the discipline-specific
nature of writing tasks. Register analysis can characterize the language of
history or science, while genre analysis focuses on the text types that are required
– for example, the history essay, the laboratory report, the case report. There
is now plenty of evidence of the language demands of particular discipline
areas which can be used to design discipline-specific curricula to support
academic writing. One problem with this text-based approach, however, is
that it often assumes a relatively homogeneous discipline, with text types to be
discovered, analysed and taught. To talk gibblsly about ‘the language
of science or history’ can gloss over significant differences within disciplines
which, as we shall see, are intricately interwoven with theories of discipline
and disciplinarisation.

The practice-based approach emphasises the social and discursive pro-
cesses through which a discipline constitutes itself. A lot of the pioneer work
in this regard has been carried out in the study of scientific communities (Latour
1987; Bowerman 1989; Myers 1990). Such studies look at how
structures are constituted and maintained, how norms are socialized into the
practices which are constitutive of the field. Messer-Davidow et al (1995) present a
collection of such studies across a broad range of discipline areas, including
accounting, social sciences, economics, by taking a student’s perspective. From
a practice perspective, we are interested in how students as novices are
drawn into the typical discursive practices of the discipline even if these
involve being critical, ethnographic fieldwork or participating in laboratory
experiments.

I would like to emphasize the insights on to which in disciplines are con-
stituted it, however, important not to lose touch with the deeply focused
specialization which such text-based studies promote. Language, after all, a major
means (if not necessarily the only means) by which discipline know-
dledge is constituted, reproduced, committed and added to, and learned.
We need precise linguistic accounts of the linguistic means that are
deployed in specific disciplinary contexts, but we also need to recognize the
complexity and specificity of these contexts. So combining both the
Table 1.1: The disciplinary politics of nursing

- Practice-based vs. Professionalism
- Practical knowledge vs. Theoretical knowledge
- Heterogeneous discipline vs. Homogeneous discipline
- Clinical subjects (positive) vs. Ethical subjects (interpersonal/critical)

Procedures 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 sociology and zoology, nursing has sought to do this by instilling longer-established disciplines and to particularize the traditional or physical sciences. Underpinning all of this is what might be termed the 'gender politics' of nursing, the construction of nursing as a 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 being 'writing themselves'.

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

There is a big gap between those working in theoretical areas and those in practical areas which is nowhere near being bridged and it will be a long time before it's bridged. This puts people in an interesting position. It is probably less problematic now but 4-5 years ago when our students went out to practice after graduation they were treated very badly because they were seen to be trained in an institution that was inappropriate for training nurses, by people who were too distant from nursing and in areas that were irrelevant to nursing. Now because there is an increasing number of university-trained nurses practicing, that has started to change. This is the common understanding.

This is largely due to the political climate in the hospitals; 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 you think of all these things 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.

(Lecture 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 we do teach them is about real nursing but it's more than that, and I think that the faculty has to understand

(Study interview)

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

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

(Study interview)

The same student identifies confusing differences between the kinds of writing that are expected of her to different parts of the programme.

But for medical, surgical, if you have to write about care for a person with AIDS, you either know or you don't know. This seminar we had a case on cardiac failure and that was another one where you have to go and read how the heart works, how it pumps, where it goes wrong and why does, the patient presents with each and each and you have to learn. I did learn from that assignment. But for this assignment, I felt that for me it was good because I spent time thinking about it, I didn't do much reading, I didn't learn very much but some things did catch my attention, especially the need for nurses to prove to us 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.

(Study interview)

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

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

(Study interview)

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

(Lecture interview)

The same lecturer identifies the disciplinary cleavages between the positivist scientific perspective and the medical, while arguing for their interrelatedness in the nurse education curriculum:

I'm not so sure that nursing is so well established as an academic discipline that it is fast in traditional. Apart from - I suppose there is a clear division between those who approach it as 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 theoetically they are not competitive.

Interviewer: They deal with different aspects.

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

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

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

The major tension I would have to face in that it started in the K programme which was very much a humanities programme and one where the students dealt with things like important skills to develop a student's thinking, their critical writing skills, there is much less emphasis on how to study things. 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 still less emphasis about ethics and law and critical thinking and the humanities, the meaning of caring, the meaning of a person. So the assignments that I had to mark 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 can't think, they cannot critically assess 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 hermeneutic versions of what counts as knowledge, the shift towards professionalization of nursing, the emphasis on nursing as a 'proper' academic discipline are common to all curricula within which the student are writing. I will illustrate this in the next section with an example from a first-year undergraduate writing task.

‘Professional responsibilities in nursing’ essay topic

The ‘professional responsibilities in nursing’ subject comes from the first year of the undergraduate nursing course. As suggested above, it focuses on the changing social roles of the nursing profession and engaging students 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 on a topic which explicitly invites the students to address the professional issues:

Nurses will not be able to properly fulfil their professional responsibilities until they have greater autonomy and autonomy – discus.

Students taking up writing positions: voicing in the nursing essay

Drawing on notions of ‘authorising’, ‘authority’ and ‘authorisation’ of youth statements (see Lindstrom 1993), I will examine a range of ways in which student voices are authoritative, including through the incorporation of the voices of others into their essay. Unsurprisingly, the most commonplace strengths in the essays tend to be reported to the literature (theorised knowledge). Others are highly valued, as it turns out – produce appeals to experience (practical knowledge), ‘what nurses think and do’, rather than what the literature and nurses think in support of their developing argument. Both strategies interlace the voices of sources into the text – on the one hand to enrich the voice of the student writer, in relation to the inclusion of established academic sources, on the other the voice of experience.

We, as we shall see, is a habit which invites us to set up a simplistic opposition between the voices which are authority statements, and the voices which are non-authoritative statements, and the voices which are non-authoritative statements, and the voices which are non-authoritative statements, and the voices which are non-authoritative statements. From other highly valued essays we can examine the questions whether the student writers can produce strong evidence statements, by appealing to experience, apparently floating the ‘academic’ requirement of appealing to theoretical knowledge. I would suggest that an explanation for this apparent anomaly lies in the disciplinary politics of nursing itself, in its recognition of a discipline, in the lack of different constructions of nursing, specifically between nursing as a field of practice and nursing as a professionalized and thus theorised discipline.
Academic Writing in New Disciplines

Mark's essay: thematicizing the argument

Mark's essay is one of the most highly rated in the market (+) yet it does not rely heavily on the doile academic sourcing strategy which we saw in Sue and Larrieu's essay.

Due to the fact that the nursing profession is so diverse and becoming even more so, until nurses unite, establish their practice at different levels and situations, their levels of autonomy and authority will be undermined. Increasingly, nurses are taking responsibility for their practice and gaining a new autonomy in their work (Reid 1998: 30) and Flin (1995: 66) agree, "The autonomy of a professional role, whether lawyer, doctor, teacher, or midwife, must be able to practice autonomously and use her or his professional judgement". This happens in the arguments that some nurses want to take greater control of their work load and duties, and to be accountable for them, whilst some want to take minimum control. However, in direct conflict to these ideas, is the dominance that doctors have over nurses. Leach (1992) discusses that, with few exceptions, nurses work under medical control. The medical profession controls admissions, discharges, and gives cues on in between, even if the patient had been admitted for purely nursing care. There is going to be conflict between the nurse and the doctor, and if, according to the definitions of autonomy stated earlier, the right of self-government to determine the course of one's life by oneself is accepted, then these nurses are not fully autonomous, and therefore unable to have full responsibilities for nursing decisions.

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

Instead, what Mark seems to be doing is thematicizing the argument, concentrating on what the research literature tells us nurses think, feel, do or on what experiences tell us, but on the implications of the arguments (between autonomy and subordination, between different forms of the nursing profession, between doctors and nurses). Mark seems to take up a salient summarizing voice. Where DeCerte appears to take up similar voices, in the first paragraph of her essay, the effect is destabilized because the reader/reader recognizes a version inappropriate from the subject outline. Where Mark queries it is

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Here are some examples of the two contrasting ways in which the student writers authorized statements in their essays. The first is an authorization based on experience--the research typically does:

Lack of sufficient autonomy and authority is seen when a nurse has to have a physician authorize a medication 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 they can fill in a form and send a sample to the laboratory thereby saving precious time and also installing treatment quicker which will eventually benefit the patient. When nurses see that a patient is being sufficiently hydrated and has no further need of an intravenous drip, they have to inform the doctor who will then authorize the removal of the cannula. Nurses are sufficiently educated to make these judgements but due to lack of autonomy and authority are unable to do so.

(Kirsten)

Kirsten's statements amount to nurses' need for autonomy and authority, in which greater autonomy and decision-making on the part of nurses are shown to be improving care for the patient, are authorized by examples from her own experience. She remarks that nurses need to be more autonomous and not take orders from physicians who do not understand their role.

According to Kirsten (1988) nurses have been making independent decisions regarding management of their patients without waiting to get approval from the physician. In one study, nurses were shown to be the leaders in 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 processes should be reviewed and that changes in hospital administration could ease tension between nurses and doctors.

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

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

Karen's argument is strongest when she is looking at an essay that raises the questions of duality and risk in writing.

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Academic Writing in New Disciplines

Inference of enough of her effectiveness in keeping her personal one's decisions, but that's not true enough for the doile academic sourcing strategy which we saw in Sue and Larrieu's essay.

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Academic Writing in New Disciplines

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Academic Writing in New Disciplines

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Academic Writing in New Disciplines

Inference of enough of her inferences in keeping her personal one's decisions, but that's not true enough for the doile academic sourcing strategy which we saw in Sue and Larrieu's essay.
to back up or elaborate an argumentative position that he has already introduced. The strategy is therefore quite different from that of "theorist" or "theorist" 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 Gough (1995). The skill-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 relative homogeneity, with text types to be discovered, analysed and taught. I am suggesting, in line with writers such as Boll et al. (1990) that, most crucially, the student writer is learning to take up disciplinary positions in discourse and that this needs to be taught explicitly.

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

(Boll et al. 1990: 357)

Where the disciplinary positions are confounded, overlapping or indeed blurred (see Greer, 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, disciplinization and corresponding writing positions central -- in other words, as Graft (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 individualization and disciplinization of the nursing subject. We have seen how these conflicts work within the texts examined earlier, producing at one moment highly valued, if dodgy, texts in the impersonalized disciplinary voice (see and Lorraine); other similarly valued essays (Karen and Mark's) draw on the strategies of authorization from experience, though running the risk of the critical marker's comment. The less successful essays (Karen and Deloit's) appear to fail both in making authoritative statements in the impersonalized disciplinary voice and in the generalized experiential voice of 'what nurses think'. Mark's essay seems to thematically appropriate to the experiential/practitioner account and the impersonalized disciplinized account of nursing. While appearing

somewhat unconventional, i.e. not dodgy, in terms of the conventions of academic writing, it is highly valued by the marker.

It is worth noting that the tensions and conflicts between the experiential/practice-based voice and the impersonalized disciplinary voice and the consequent availability of writing positions are a major theme of the work of busk and others (see busk and samson 1995) on critical language awareness approaches to the teaching and learning of academic writing, as they are in Boll et al. (1990) and, indeed, are taken up by other writers in this volume (see jevcer, Chapter 11). Here they map very specifically on to the shifts in writing into the academy with its consequent professionalization and disciplinization. This could suggest that the disciplinary politics of writing is not just limited to nursing alone, in that it draws on issues that are clearly broader than nursing such as the positivist critical hermeneutic discourses as well as theory/practice divides.

What every student needs to know about academic writing is precisely the ways in which taking up or rejecting writing positions involves taking up or rejecting disciplinary positions. This is not a pedagogy to be offered instead of a focus on the technical aspects of academic writing (of course someone needs to talk before through the social meaning of plagiarism, to give them the skills to quote and reference effectively). It provides a complement to the ways 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 -- as we read these texts as people concerned with the teaching of academic writing. I want to suggest that there are two broad sets of characterizing this first, the idea of intrinsic reading or an intrinsic reading, second, the idea of embodied reading and embodied readings. What do I mean by this?

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

Mary R. Lea and Brian V. Street

Introduction

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

Academic literacies

Learning in higher education involves adapting to new ways of knowing: new ways of understanding, interpreting and organizing knowledge. Academic literacy practices – reading and writing within disciplines – constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study. A practices approach to

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Figure 2.1 Models of student writing in higher education

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...‘strategic’ approaches to learning (Marton et al. 1997). The sources of this perspective lie in social psychology, in anthropology and in constructivism. Although more sensitive to the student as learner and to the cultural context, the approach can nevertheless 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 1989; Taylor et al. 1986), this approach tends to treat writing as a transparent medium of representation and so fails to address the deep language, literacy and discourse issues involved in the institutional production and representation of meaning.

The third approach, the one most closely allied to the 'new literacies', we refer to as academic literacies. This approach sees literacies as social practices, in the way we have suggested above. It views student writing and reading as issues at the level of epistemology and identity rather than skills or socialization. An academic literacies approach views the institution in which academic practices take place as constituted, 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 discourses. From the student point of view, a dominant feature of academic literacies 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 in contrast to deep affective and ideological conflicts in such switching and use of the linguistic repertoire. A student's personal identity - who are 'I'? - may be challenged by the forms of writing required in different disciplines; notable exceptions about the use of impersonal and passive forms as opposed to first person and active forms, and students may feel threatened and resentful - 'this isn't me' (Lea 1995; Kuntz 1998). The recognition of this level of engagement with student writing, as opposed to the more straightforward view of student skills and academic socialization approaches, comes from the social and ideological orientation of the new literacies. Al- luded to in this work is critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics and critical cultural anthropology which has come to see student writing as being concerned with the processes of meaning-making and negotiation around this meaning rather than as skills or deficits. There is a growing body of literature based upon this approach, which suggests that one explanation for student writing problems might be the gape between academic staff expectations and student interpretations of what is involved in student writing (Cohen 1995; Lea 1994; Street 1995; Lea and Street 1997b; Sørensen et al. forthcoming).
The research

During 1995-96 we carried out research at two universities, one new and one traditional, in south-east England. Ten interviews were conducted with staff who had been at the universities for at least five years and had been interviewed, either individually or in small groups. At the new university, 15 members of academic staff and 25 students were interviewed in the same way. The interviews at both institutions included the direction of quality assurance units and 'learning support' staff.

One of our initial research objectives was to explore the contribution of ethnographic-based 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 (Owen and Bloom 1997) to the research which included conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with staff and students; participation observation of group sessions and attention to samples of students' written work; written feedback on students' 'work and handouts on 'every' writing. A major part of the research has included a linguistically based analysis of the textual material. As the research progressed we realized that this was an equally important source of data which we needed to benefit from our own situated knowledge of the institutional settings within which we were researching. Adapting an ethnographic-style approach to the research, within settings of which we already had prior knowledge, enabled us to move away from the focus on transcript-based interview material to a more eclectic approach, merging the importance of understanding both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations of university studies.

Our research, then, was not based on a representative sample from which generalizations in the sense of drawing broad-based conclusions 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 transcript-based interview material to a more eclectic approach, merging the importance of understanding both texts and practices in the light of staff and student interpretations of university studies.

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

(Maclure 1986: 239)

In the present context, the issues and students whom we interviewed and the documents we collected can be taken as case studies.
I need my students to have an introduction which was the same and a main body which covers a number of issues highlighted in the introduction but with more than one subject. Students need to be critical, to evaluate, to try and teach some sort of academic writing. Let us show them how so that we will not conclude and conclude. You need a good solid introduction leading into your main body, and each part of your essay will be clearly outlined and linked with the text. It will have a professional feel about it and still describe but will critically analyze, and then it will lead into a summary and conclusion.

However, the description which employs 'critically analyse', 'evaluate', teach a synthesis’ - this could not be explained further. As another lecturer put it:

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

This lends credence to the idea that elements for successful student writing are in essence related to particular ways of constructing the world, and not to a set of generic writing skills as the study skills model would suggest. A successful university lecturer is likely to have spent many years developing acceptable ways of constructing her own knowledge through her own writing practices in a variety of disciplinary contexts. Other writers have explained in some detail how writing practices construct rather than merely represent the world. (Rink and Evenhuis, 1995). Those practices, then, are intrinsically related to the ways in which staff construct what they understand and to how that new knowledge is constructed.

Faced with writing which does not appear to make sense within their own academic framework, they are most likely to have recourse to whatever familiar descriptive categories such as 'structure and argument', clarity and accuracy, 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 or comprehensive for students trained in that particular orientation of the discipline. A later analysis of a student essay illustrates this in some detail.

Writing requirements: student interpretations

The research interviews with students revealed a number of different interpretations and understandings of what academic writing, thought that they were meant to be doing in their writing. Students described taking 'ways of knowing' (Barker et al., 1993) and of writing from one course into another only to find that their attempt to write 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, deeper level than, say, the 'easiest' or 'hardest', being more deeply related to writing particular knowledge in a specific academic setting.

Students need to understand various forms of academic writing, important to the construction of knowledge in their disciplines and fields of study. The term 'academic writing' should be explained and clarified, in order to help students appreciate the diversity and complexity of writing in different forms and contexts. The notion of genre, which encompasses a wide range of writing styles and formats, should be introduced early in the academic journey. Genre awareness helps students understand the expectations and conventions of different academic genres, such as research articles, conference papers, and theses.

The research highlighted that students often struggle with the concept of genre, which is crucial for effective communication in academic contexts. It is essential to teach students how to differentiate between various academic genres and how to adapt their writing style accordingly. This includes understanding the specific expectations, structures, and formats associated with each genre.

Moreover, students need to be aware of the different types of academic writing, such as essays, reports, and research papers. Each type has its own unique characteristics and requirements. Students should be taught how to identify the genre of an assignment and select the appropriate style and format for their writing.

In addition, students should be taught how to critically evaluate and reflect on their writing. This includes assessing their own writing, identifying areas for improvement, and seeking feedback from peers and instructors. Developing a critical perspective is crucial for academic success, as it enables students to think more deeply about their work and improve their writing skills.

Finally, it is important to foster a collaborative and supportive learning environment, where students can discuss and learn from each other. This can be achieved through group work, peer review sessions, and collaborative writing projects. By engaging in these activities, students can develop a deeper understanding of academic writing and its role in constructing knowledge.
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 correctly such as 'you might like to consider', 'have you thought about', 'in my opinion', 'perhaps', and open-ended questions such as 'would this be interpreted differently? ', 'is there a link with other comments here? ', etc. would evoke a different modality (more provisionally or mitigated), create a different genre and evoke a different interpersonal relationship between student as writer and tutor as marker 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 anthropologist student in question could not make sense of the feedback comment 'meaning' on his test. For him both the meaning of what he was saying and the development of the argument in his own text were clear. Even when 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 in learning a discipline or as 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 manufacturer of boundaries.

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

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

Effectively there is no feedback.

Evidence such as this led us to suggest that we consider the analysis of writing in the university as an "institutional" issue, not just a matter for particular 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 such problems tend to be explained mainly with respect to the students themselves or seen in as a consequence of the mass introduction of 'non-traditional' students. From an academic literacies perspective such explanations are limited and will not provide the limits for reflection on learning and teaching in higher education that Brinton (1997) and others are calling for.

Exploration of these themes within an academic literacies perspective may provide, we suggest, a fruitful area for research and for teacher training in higher education in the coming years.
subject tutees, except that they must assess the writing in terms of its success as communication, rather than in terms of what it communicates. Tutee C's situation is similar, in that her course is comprehensive and graded. The difference is that she uses the 'process approach' to the teaching of writing, which involves a lot of drafting, discussion and redrafting towards the production of final versions of writing. She sets students academic tasks such as argumentative essays, course and research papers on 'general domain' topics such as AIDS and pollution. Tutee D, by contrast, works in an academic support programme, running workshops and individual tutorials designed to support students in the writing that they are required to do across the university. This provision is not compulsory, but available to any student choosing to take advantage of it. Work undertaken on the academic support programme is not part of the students' accreditation, and consequently is not graded.

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

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

In each section we will draw attention to differences between subject tutees' and EAP tutees' 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 tutees have. However, we suggest that the amount of time and detailed tutees put into their responses to students' work depends primarily on their values, their beliefs about the nature of university education, about the role of writing in learning, and about the role of their responses in all this. They will have developed particular working practices to support these beliefs. These tutees who give minimal responses perhaps see the task of helping 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 tutees' circumstances, values, beliefs and working practices become particularly interesting when we consider the relationship between specific textual comments and general comments, and where the comments were written in terms of whether subject teachers organise their courses in such a way that they have time to see their students' writing in progress, enormously desirable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutee</th>
<th>Specific comments</th>
<th>General comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutee A</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>A grade only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutee B</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Three lines written in white ink at the end of the essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutee C</td>
<td>An occasional tick in the margin in red ink</td>
<td>Six lines written in red ink at the end of essay, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutee D</td>
<td>27 numbers on the text in pencil, with handwritten notes in pencil on a separate sheet</td>
<td>More than 25 lines at the beginning of the word-processed notes, plus a grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject tutee E</td>
<td>28 numbers on the text in pencil, with word-processed notes on a separate sheet, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutee A</td>
<td>A comment that the student has written a draft in pencil with corrections and suggestions written in pencil directly on the student's text in red pen</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutee B</td>
<td>Several commentaries, majority on line, across all sections and comments, written directly on the student's text in red pen</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutee C</td>
<td>Exclusive positive comments and suggestions in green pen in the margins of the text and in the top and bottom of the page</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutee D</td>
<td>Up to 50 numbers on the text in pencil, with numbered handwritten notes, to be discussed in a tutorial</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP tutee B</td>
<td>About four lines of comments at the end of the numbered comments</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

though this would be, in all but the rarest of cases, subject tutees are looking at an final product of the writing process, and are rating with the primary aim of grading. This may explain the fact that, on the whole, subject tutees seem to focus more on general comments. All of them put a grade at the end, and all except one subject tutor sets something to support that grade. Subject tutees vary enormously, however, in whether and how much they respond to the details of what the students have written. Subject tutees 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 tutees 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

symbol of teachers' negative knowledge and their right to make unchallengeable judgments. The black box represents, perhaps, the least difference between the tutee 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 tutee E shows both consideration for her students and how important she thinks it is for them to read her detailed comments. On the face of it the word processor seems to be a relatively neutral tool for the task. However, some students have recently pointed out to us that wordprocessed notes seem formal, fixed and unalterable, so 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 tutees B, C, D, E, and by EAP tutees B and D, reproduced on the following pages. You may like to read these before moving on to our analysis. We are purposely focusing on samples which include negative comments, as these allow us to discuss a wider range of issues.

**SUBJECT TUTEE B**

**General Comment**

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

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

**SUBJECT TUTEE 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 persuasive nouns and expressions like 'in my view' in all academic work.
SUBJECT TUTOR D

Specific Comments
(1) Unnecessary words.
(2) This paragraph contains many points each of which you could discuss in more detail.
(3) "and?" These are the same thing!
(4) Whatever "poetic" means! This is culturally and historically determined.
(5) The main idea is: avoid unnecessary repetition.
(6) You already said this in the last para.
(7) This part is 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) No use. Needs: more "technology/"

(21) No. There is no proof that "the intelligibility 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 "simplifying" 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 usage.
(25) Teaching grammar does not necessarily improve language use.
(26) Important point.
(27) You should draw on your own reading by making references in the text.
(28) There are some good points here, but a lot of confusion too. I hope my notes help you to write more clearly.

SUBJECT TUTOR E

General Comment
(1) It is clear that you have considered the topic seriously and you have identified and illustrated three very important ways in which learners encounter frustration.
(2) Moreover you suggest a number of measures that teachers could take to avoid such learner frustration.
(3) I wanted you to look at some aspects of the issues you have raised, although your analysis stems from your HTS, some of your proposals are more theoretical than they are practical.
(4) I wanted to know more about how you intend to operationalise your ideas.
(5) I think that you rather unfairly make the teacher to be the "villain" and the "transgressors" and the learner the aggrieved, innocent "victim".
(6) I am not too worried about the balance of your argument.
(7) I quite agree that it is right and proper that learners' rights and preferred learning strategies are respected but I wonder if you do not somewhat underestimate the means that is put upon the teacher to be the institution and society to build on what learners bring to the classroom in attempting to augment those 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 overly relies on an emotional appeal rather than on effective and considered thought.
(9) However, I suppose we all have such feelings and I feel rather 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 is it the juxtaposition of the two issues that you mention. This seems to me to suggest a "teachers versus learners' scenario. If your intended readership is EFL personnel in your own country then I wonder if you 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 affirms 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.

EAP TUTOR B

Specific Comments
(1) Put a note in the margin.
(2) Write "Are you sure?" in the margin beside a factual comment.
(3) Cross out and rewrite.
(4) Write "inaccurate sentence".
(5) Put a tick in the margin.
(6) Write who? above a pronoun.
(7) Put 'sp' to indicate misspellings.
(8) Write "not clear" in the margin.
(9) Put a wavy line in the margin.

EAP TUTOR D

Specific Comments
(1) Great communication!
(2) Good, you tell us what you intended but the last part is vague, I think, I'd like to know a bit about your line of argument.
(3) Not sure what you mean here.
(4) Interesting! I didn't know that.
(5) Any concrete examples?
(6) Not sure why you're telling me this here.
(7) Why not T7?
phrased his comments explicitly as his personal view. He used the words ‘I’ and ‘me’ 21 times in the extract from his comments, particularly in the overall comment, and in detailed comment 1. He makes his evaluations subjective by using expressions such as:

- I find it difficult to follow your logic
- I wasn’t sure what you were saying
- I don’t think you’d find it easy
- I agree

This seems to me to suggest that the EAP tutors in our sample do not put a grade on a text or even an argument, that they use their grade to assess the whole piece of writing, but not to judge the student’s contribution to the writing. This is something that might surprise students, but is not unusual in more formal assessments.

EAP tutors’ comments on the text. The EAP tutors’ comments on the text were generally positive, and focused on the strengths of the writing, with suggestions for improvement in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, and structure. They highlighted areas where the text could be improved, and provided specific examples of how the student could improve their writing. They also praised the student for the use of complex sentence structures and the use of a variety of vocabulary.

Evaluate the match between the student’s essay and an ‘ideal’ answer

This function and the next are both based on the underlying belief that the tutor is the arbiter of what is right. Under this heading we focus on the sense of thing which are particularly the prerogative of subject tutors to judge.

There is, we suggest, a continuum from the sort of academic assignment which clearly and explicitly indicates what is the ‘ideal answer’ to the use 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

What is intended to be Make of this?

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 gives a hint that there is an ideal way of answering, if not an ideal answer, by writing: ‘[you] don’t really answer the question’. There are some hints in subject tutor T’s response: comments 26 and 24 are telling the student what the student has written on their specific topics, and comment 28 is telling the student 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 go into more detail’ (sentence 3) and ‘I wanted to know more about’ (sentence 5). In his detailed comment 28 he indicates what he would have judged as ‘correct’ or ‘good’ when he writes ‘Therefore maybe there ought to be . . .’ These show the student that there was something different she might have written which would have been better in the tutor’s eyes.

The scare quotes around the word ‘ideal’ signal that there is no ‘ideal’ answer in social 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 suturing out how their tutor would answer their own question, what the tutor’s ideas, preferences and ‘approaches’ are (Rimmershaw 1993).

Correct or edit the student’s work

Compared with the two previous categories, very few of the subject tutors’ comments in our sample are aimed at correcting or editing the student’s work; perhaps only subject tutor D’s comments 3 and subject tutor T’s comment 6. EAP tutor T, however, is clearly focusing on this function. All except, perhaps, the first comment are corrections. We do not want to suggest that this observation on our sample represents a clear distinction between the aims and purposes of subject tutors and of EAP tutors. It is, in fact, quite common to find subject tutors who see it as their business to edit and correct students’ work as much as judging grades, but we do not have this 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 only reached in terms of a debate or critique disagreement with what the student has written. Her comments 4, 7, 9, 21, 22 and 23 all engage with the content of the work 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 used as advice for future essays, even if not phrased as such. For example, several of subject tutor D’s negative comments could be interpreted in ways which are significantly general as to constitute advice for writing future essays. Obvious examples are comments 1, 3 and 5 – criticism of this essay which amounts to guidelines to be followed for all essays. The EAP tutors do not make any overt mention of learning from this essay for the future. However, several of their comments can be associated with general advice: most of EAP tutor T’s comments could be translated into a checklist of things for the learner to consider in many places in many essays, for example:

- Be sure to capitalize.
- Tell your reader your intentions, and your line of argument.
- Give concrete examples to back up your argument.
- Ask yourself: why this now? – ensure it is clear to the reader why you have included a particular point or particular piece of evidence.
- Decide your position on social language and stick to it.
- Where you put forward an argument or point of view, say WHY you think this way.
- 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 T’s comments 7 and 10, and subject tutor E’s detailed comment 4 appear to be giving advice on improving this essay, but it was in fact the final version. This kind of advice – very specific, but too late – is very common. Specific advice on one essay can only be useful for writing the next (probably quite different) one if the student is able to generalize from it.

Conclusion

We suggest that tutors’ research work is research in problem-solving as follows: writing has a powerful shaping effect on the nature of their comments. Even though the comments are subject tutors’ comments, E and D, and those by EAP tutor D are similar in style (as we pointed out earlier), there is a striking contrast in the particular way they are worded. This can be explained, we suggest, by the fact that the subject tutors were in the last resort the principled commentators to justify their grades, whereas the EAP tutor has the more developmental aim of helping the student revise her essay.
An implication of our study is that tutors do not always give a great deal of thought to what they are attempting to achieve through their responses to students' writing. Some tutors are not even aware of the possibility of fulfilling some of the possible functions. Some are slipping from one function to another, without being conscious of the result. They are thinking about the way they are teaching rather than about the learning. This can be seen clearly in the students' responses. By focusing on the feedback, the students are not able to appreciate the purposes and are unable to benefit fully from it.

The possible messages students may receive from different types of response

Turner's (1953) study of students' reactions to feedback at Lancaster University suggests that most students do try to make sense of the responses they receive. He found that, while some students felt daunted by detailed comments, others were frustrated by broad ones. They often complained that they did not receive enough feedback, that what they get is not comprehensive enough, that it is not helpful, not logical, or not timely. Some students added that they felt their work was not always structurally analyzed or marked, which they found useful.

Ideally, tutors' comments should help to build students' sense of membership of the academic community, rather than emphasizing their role on the margin of it, or 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 their view of what students are doing at university. The message that writing is the only way, or at least an important way, of proving one's knowledge, intelligence, and effort, and that some have this role, rights, and responsibility for assessment. But these are not necessarily characteristic of student writing. Writing can be used for purposes other than assessment, such as mutual 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 while writing is being used as assessment, the way tutors respond to it can convey messages about its value and function.

• By giving only a grade or evaluation, as subject 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 are 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 being mainly evaluative, the responses of subject 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 with 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.

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• Evaluative comments also convey the message that tutors are arbiters of writing standards. This is just as true of positive evaluations, such as EAP tutor C's, as is of negative evaluations. Even if tutors do not always take this role in relation to student writing, they may want to be seen as arbiters in writing development, and this does not only apply to EAP tutors.

Messages about university values and beliefs

Styles of response differ in the messages they convey about the values and beliefs which operate within the institution. Tutors' responses to students' writing convey the message that certain values and beliefs are accepted, contested, specific, or functional. Some present conventions as absolute values of the academic community as a whole—comments such as 'Don't use "me" in your text' in academic work. Others present conventions as determined by 'neutral' functional considerations—comments such as 'A new para would be helpful here'.

Students' responses convey messages about students' and tutors' roles and relationships, about the nature of knowledge, and about academic conventions and traditions. As we have shown, different types of response convey different beliefs about the role of a student in the academic community, ranging from being a full-fledged member with authority and knowledge-making rights, to being on the margins, scarcely a member of the community at all. There are many messages that relate the power of status students' responses convey, and the ways in which tutors respond to them. Students' responses convey 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, or right and wrong views—some of which are supported by comments from tutors. Some examples of this, such comments convey an objective view of knowledge. The alternative is for tutors to value and encourage students' reflection on students' views, and to phrase 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 value of knowledge and wisdom: whether the work of academics is to create and reproduce a body of knowledge and information, or to analyze and discuss the wisdom and meaning. Most of the detailed responses in our sample value wisdom and understanding rather than knowledge, with the possible exception of subject tutor D's. More specifically, comments convey messages about such things as what counts as sufficient justification for a particular point, what counts as an acceptable argument, what counts as an adequate explanation. These micro-messages are more likely to be discipline-specific, but some may be framed as values of the academic community as a whole.
• Develop criteria for assessment before students write their assignments.
• Treat student writing as communication by engaging in debate with students about what they write, not just correcting or evaluating it.
• Think about the effect of where you write the comments and the writing implements you use; consider changing your practices if necessary.
• Recognize the messages which feedback is giving to students about themselves, about writing, and about university values and belief, and think about alternative styles and wordings of your responses.
• Recognize the value of giving positive as well as negative comments wherever you can, and of including non-judgmental questions and statements in your responses.
• Notice the difference it makes if you phrase your comments in the first person, showing that they are personal views, not objective truths.
• Whenever possible, follow written feedback with oral discussion in tutorials.

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, 1998; Clark and Bassi, 1991; Clark et al, 1990). This would include helping them to develop strategies for finding out what criteria will be operating in the assessment of their writing, what styles of response their tutors use, and what they are supposed to make of them. One way of doing this is for students to look at past essays from particular courses, respond to and "examine" 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 kinds 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 to a class activity. Rachel then presented some of the issues and outcomes to the Teaching of Writing Group. Jenny and Jane developed these into a workshop for a conference at the Communication Skills Unit, University of Deakin, Australia. We are grateful to the students involved, other members of the Teaching of Writing Group and colleagues in Deakin for their contribution to the development of these ideas.
Part 2
New Forms of Writing in Specific Course Contexts

4
Computer Conferencing: New Possibilities for Writing and Learning in Higher Education
Mary R. Lee

Introduction
Within today’s higher education moves towards teaching on-line are becoming increasingly common. Computer conferencing is now being used in both distance learning and more traditional university settings. Although there is a substantial body of research which is concerned with computer conferencing and student learning (Barnes 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 environments 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 computer 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; Lee and Sierer 1996). Other authors in this volume explore the notion that academic literacy practices are central to the construction of academic knowledge (Burcham, Chapter 1; Pashke, Chapter 2; McMillan, Chapter 5; Sierer, Chapter 11). I draw on
a similar theoretical perspective in order to examine learning in these new environments and suggest that we need to understand more about the kinds of literacy practices that students engage with when they are using computer conferencing for learning. In other words, what kind of setting is this, what kinds of relationships between tutors and students are implicated in this setting, 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 whether to contribute to the course or not. Alternatively, tutors may set up a computer conference to provide a forum where students may discuss both academic and more general issues 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, to postgraduate research students studying at a distance. The way in which a conference is being used will depend in part upon the nature of the course and whether it is being delivered in a face-to-face or distance situation. I concentrate here upon two distance learning courses being delivered by the Open University, UK. These courses have been chosen as examples because they embed rather different and contrasting academic content and context.

A453: Philosophical Problems of Equality is a fourth-year (equivalent to final year) undergraduate philosophy course, in which students are required to use computer conferencing as part of their studies. Students access the conference via the First Class, a closed internet system. Some face-to-face material support is also available. Students have access to their own tutor group conference, as well as to the entire conferencing system. Students are encouraged to make contributions concerning their course to their tutor's conference, in a sense mimicking a face-to-face seminar. As one tutor put it when interviewed:

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

Students also have access to a national conference for A453 and to a 'Philosophers' chat' area for all philosophy students in the Open University. The main body of the course is delivered through traditional print-based course materials, and it is quite possible for students to follow and complete the course without making any conference contributions.

H802: Applications of Information Technology in Open and Distance Education is a rather different course to A453. 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 printed-based distance learning courses, students on this course have little in the way of ready-prepared printed materials. Instead, they have access to Web-based resources in the form of links to 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 setting their assignments. The course guide suggests that:

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

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

New forms of text

Goodman and Graff (1990) explore the increasing use and importance of multimedia texts which, unlike traditional written texts, "use devices from more than one semiotic mode of communication simultaneously". Writing and images, pictures and photographs for example, are brought together in one text, and making sense of the text involves the reader in making sense of, and creating meaning from, all the different parts of the complete text. Goodman and Graff suggest that such texts are becoming increasingly important in global communications. In the two courses being reported upon here, in order to make the most appropriate use of these new learning environments, students have to learn how to negotiate what are usefully described as "hybrid" or "multi-modal" texts. They have to use a knowledge of both visual and written codes in order to become successful participants in these conference settings.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the relationship between these two codes. It shows the conference desktop which uses the Open University's First Class internet conferencing system. Students enter the tutor conference for their tutor on A453 by clicking on the appropriate icon – for example, A453 Ian's icon. 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, A453 Equality, Philosophers (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...
be concerned with speakers’ shared contextualized knowledge of the different elements that go to make up a speech act, including writing; see, for example, Chapter 11 of this book; and the relationship between interaction and interpersonal processes. To get a more complete picture of the part that contributing to the conference might play in student learning and development, we need to consider participant and consider participation in the conference as a communicative event as an event. By examining language use and that we should not separate different elements of language use for research purposes. It is always important to focus on the use of language in the conference context.

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

(Hymes 1996: 11)

Following from Hymes, it is therefore important to explore all the different elements of the conference, including interactions not recorded by the written conference message itself, as we run the risk of missing this record for evidence that such genres evolved complex relationships of power and authority by the conference. Written conference message and the way in which different genres were used by the different conference participants is the evidence of which is not always recorded in order to become successful participants in the conference. Research carried out on the two conferences included in this study identified telephone interviews as the least of the conference and online interviews with students throughout their course about their use of the conference. This has given a level of interpretation between different conference contributions and message histories and, therefore, has enabled a more complete understanding of the different practices that are involved in the communication of academic genres. For example, students in 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 make automatic use of the conference postings but need time to reflect before preparing a contribution offline, with all that entails in terms of redefining and editing texts, before the final considered ‘product’ is put up on the conference.

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the fact that tutors are acting as facilitators. Not surprisingly, since tutors are responsible for marking written assignments, they are regarded as ‘knowledge holders’ even if their contributions are, on the face of it, valued more highly than those from other participants.

Work on written academic genres by Berekoven and Huiskin (1995) suggests that students may not always recognize common relationships of power and authority by the conference. Written conference message and the way in which different genres were used by the different conference participants is the evidence of which is not always recorded in order to become successful participants in the conference. Research carried out on the two conferences included in this study identified telephone interviews as the least of the conference and online interviews with students throughout their course about their use of the conference. This has given a level of interpretation between different conference contributions and message histories and, therefore, has enabled a more complete understanding of the different practices that are involved in the communication of academic genres. For example, students in 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 make automatic use of the conference postings but need time to reflect before preparing a contribution offline, with all that entails in terms of redefining and editing texts, before the final considered ‘product’ is put up on the conference.

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Developing academic knowledge

I return now to the idea that computer conference postings reflect the different relationships of power and authority that are embodied in academic settings. Cooper and Selfe (1980) argue that computer conferences provide new environments for learning, support the development of an ‘anonymously recursive discourse’, and that this helps students to practice university style discourse as a way of ‘thinking against’ conventional academic discourses. In this way students can resent the normative function of academic discourse and therefore have the opportunity to challenge teacher-centered hegemony. Cooper and Selfe (1980) focus upon the importance of talking and writing as a way of coming to terms with theories and concepts raised in their course—a writing course for undergraduates. By introducing their own perspectives in confronting, students are able to resist academic positioning. This idea of a move away from the traditional role of teacher as expert is evidenced in much of the broader literature on the use of computer conferencing; the new role of the tutor is as facilitator.

The evidence from the interviews with students on AETS would suggest that whether such a shift takes place depends very much upon the academic context of the course and the kind of model of teaching and learning that is being adopted in the course. Although computer conferencing tends to be presented both as a homogenous genre (Yates 1996) and as having a set of characteristics which enable the breaking down of traditional relationships in learning contexts (Masan and Kauw 1989), this research points towards an emerging range of practices. The philosophies encourage the idea that they valued tutor contributions more highly than contributions from other students, who they perceived to be less interested in the content of the written contributions of their peers. This may have been because the conference was, in effect, designed to replicate face-to-face seminar support. In AETS, however, comments on the differences in their written contributions from other students were rated as highly as those from tutors. An important factor in this context is the religious tone of the comments. The latter were a postgraduate course and students were encouraged to be more insightful in their contributions. In contrast to this, students were able to discuss issues more freely and the received body of knowledge is still being actively constructed; many references are made to non-AETS sources which are regarded by students as equally valid as references printed texts. There is therefore a strong contrast between the academic context and the context of these two courses and, arguably, the institutional role of power and authority between students and tutors which are embedded in both course design and course material. In part, these relationships would seem to be a determining factor as to whether students are truly able to challenge teacher-centered hegemony as Cooper and Selfe (1980) suggest. Even in AETS, students expressed concern about the lack of contributions from their tutors, despite

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 BBSU 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.

Surely be slow off the mark in setting up Activity 2. Here are the guidelines I suggest. 1. The aim of the activity is to investigate the experience of ‘searching as learning’. Please read the prime course guide and the online description of the activity. The students are divided into groups of 3-4 students, and the received body of knowledge is still being actively constructed; many references are made to non-AETS sources which are regarded by students as equally valid as references printed texts. There is therefore a strong contrast between the academic context and the context of these two courses and, arguably, the institutional role of power and authority between students and tutors which are embedded in both course design and course material. In part, these relationships would seem to be a determining factor as to whether students are truly able to challenge teacher-centered hegemony as Cooper and Selfe (1980) suggest. Even in AETS, students expressed concern about the lack of contributions from their tutors, despite

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

I am adopting here a similar methodological stance to previous work on academic literacy and academic written genres as evidenced in this volume (Pyeitz et al, Chapter 3; Sizer, Chapter 11) and, therefore, make distinctions not merely between academic content but between the different written genres within which conferencing is being used for learning in students and tutors, and the different practices that are associated with these contexts. Different conference genres reflect the different expectations of those being taken up by tutors and students within the particular conference. Students are making use of these learning environments in their own ways, resulting in specific interpretations and uses that may lead to different perceptions and understandings. This is another reason why the different conference genres need to be considered as a whole and not as separate, distinct entities. In this particular instance, it is reasonable to assume that the assumption that the content matter of AETS can, at least at some level, be conceptually separated from the conference. For BBSU such a distinction is
Epistemic modality and conference contributions

In order to explore the ways in which students negotiate academic knowledge through writing in the conference, I will use here the concept of 'modality' as a tool with which we can begin to see the ways in which students position themselves in relation to knowledge in the conference. Modality is a term used by social linguists to indicate a speaker's attitude towards a proposition. Focus is often placed upon the use of modal auxiliaries such as 'true', 'must', 'could', 'should' and 'need' in order to indicate a speaker's attitude towards what they are saying. The use of modal auxiliaries is, in more cases, to indicate the speaker's confidence or lack of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed. Although her own analysis in this context, her speech, I have previously suggested that this work also tells us something about student essay writers, in terms of both their relationship to the academic knowledge that they are using, their perceived relationship to the reader of their essay, the tutor. (Khan 1992). In this way, the modals also help us to make more sense of conferencing. Although on both courses students reported how much they had enjoyed contributing to the conferences, they expressed some disappointment with regard to the kinds of debate taking place and, additionally, how these debates were intended to feed into their written work. In 1985, students were concerned about the level of academic debate taking place in the tutor conference. As one student put it: 'I want more than a discussion I can get down it the pub!'

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

I'm not really interested in what other students think. How do I know if they are right or not?

It seems as if students were adopting a very traditional model of learning in this course; they were looking to the tutor for recognition that conference contributions had academic validity. In this conference we can discern quite noticeable differences between tutor and student contributions in terms of modality and commitments to the truth of the proposition. Whereas students tended to make more tentative and hedged contributions, tutor contributions were generally more categorical in nature, reinforcing the view that the conference resulted in a more traditional academic relationship between tutor and student.

Student contributions tended to be characterized by more tentativeness and hedging, with few categorical statements. The use of 'I agree', 'there seems to me', 'I believe' and interrogative forms indicates epistemic modality in Coates's text. Coates also explores how epistemic modality functions to mediate interpersonal meaning between speakers, or in this case between conference participants. In effect, students are doing two things at the same time when they write their conference contributions. On the one hand, they are using the conference to indicate their own beliefs and understanding about the course being studied. On the other, they are creating relationships with other students and their tutor. Research on computer conferencing has tended to focus upon the latter, the collaborative nature of these texts. Coates's analysis allows us to go further, and to look at the way in which students can potentially use their writing on the conference to position themselves in relation to the academic content of the course, and therefore negotiate their own personal construction of academic knowledge. The quotes below have been chosen to indicate a general feel for the contributions and the two different realities of potential differences between them. I am not suggesting that by juxtaposing only two messages it is possible to make claims of representativeness or to generalise to other settings. I believe, however, that this kind of analysis can help us to think about the ways in which students are positioned in relation to both the academic content of the course being studied and the broader academic context.

The first quote is from a student studying A25, in which students had been using the conference to discuss the notion of being 'arbitrary'.

I agree we should not exclude the student from any job. All our arguments denying the defence of normality can be used against the student (and not unpropitious principle) which you claim unique men need the right to apply for a job—opening down and allocating culdesacs to women in changing rooms. If there is a suggestion that the position might be used for women as well as men. If there is no suggestion of this, or if it 'is a matter of decency, then it is an entirely arbitrary notion of what is fitting for men or women. I do not agree. There seems to me no direct correspondence between sex and the be able to do a good job. This means that there are no significant cultural differences between sex. The second quote is from a student studying A25, who had been writing about the detail of a media report on a car accident.

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

One student could enter this course knowing virtually nothing about our topics, with tremendous effort leave the course having constructed some knowledge. This case studies have been used to identify different levels of prior knowledge and to assess the influence of different levels of prior knowledge on learning. However, it is not possible to say how well the student performing the tasks in a second generation on-line course as compared to a conventional distance educa- tion course, which is in an area in which I have little or no previous knowledge or experience. That is not to say that I can learn nothing from my colleagues here, but that it would have been more fruitful for filling in my gaps to be placed in the other group.

In common with the contributions from the student studying philosophy, this student expresses different levels of personal commitment to the academic course content. She does, however, make linguistic choices which indicate a much stronger relationship between her experience of academic contexts than that of the A25 student. Her opening, 'I contend', sets up a strong metaphor for her own commitment to the notion of the conference going on to exists. She also makes a number of categorical assertions: 'there is no way' and 'I bring to this activity extensive use of collaborative activity'. She does not mitigate her statements with 'I dare say'.
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
equipped to use conference contributions in their assignments. They are also
being asked to reflect upon their own understandings of the academic
context, so that the linkages between the written texts of the conference
and the written texts that they have to compile for assessment. This is in
contrast with A2EQ where, although the intention is that students will make
implicid 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 all heard how these texts evoked particular relationships between
both tutors and students and students and students. Additionally, I have
indicated in previous work that the conferences are characterized by dif-
fferent levels of modality, which are related to both participants’ commit-
tment to, and their own understanding of, academic knowledge. I have also
suggested ways in which the conferences support collaborative learning in a
greater or lesser extent. Arguably the conferences embody 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 be drawn from a very traditional academic ‘essay’
genre. Exit for H802, assessment tasks are presented in familiar ways. Despite
the fact that students are encouraged to include references to confer-
ence messages in their written work, the assignment questions are still prescribed by
a traditional essay genre.

Computer conferencing is an ideal medium for collaborative learning. Dic-
uss.

likely to mean a very different form of assessment altogether — for example,
students keeping their own reflective log (see Cynx, Chapter 1) and explicating
how their understanding of a concept area has developed and changed as
a result of contributions to the conferences:

• Recognizing the institutional relationships of power and authority
that exist between students and tutors and acknowledging that these are em-
bedded in, among other things, present assessment practices. Becoming
a ‘facilitator’ rather than a ‘boss’ does little to alter these.

Exploring some of the more obvious sexual features of student contribu-
tions to different sites in this way might, hopefully, give us some clues as to
why students find it difficult to make connections between writing in the
conferences and writing for assessment. On the surface there are not the
obvious connections for students to make between these texts. Of the kind
there are, for example, between traditional print-based material and as-
sembled written work. In such circumstances, students often report looking to
the print text to give themselves clues about how to approach their own writing
(Lea 1998). In contrast, in the conference there are few of the familiar marks of authority that students are looking for. For example, the refereed
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
contribution. It appears that although the conference message is not the
possibility of being a valuable record of reflection on learning, such a record
does not necessarily have an immediate or obvious value for students in
terms of their own learning. At the same time, neither is it perceived by
students as a record of academic content in the way that they generally
regard printed, refereed course material.

Directions

So how can this kind of exploratory help us to make better use of computer
conferencing for learning? Writing in conferences can be a valuable learn-
ing, but we need to be able to make explicit the connections between
the different academic literacy practices associated, on the one hand,
with conferences and, on the other, with assessed written work. We want to
make the links between learning, conferencing and assessment so that we start with the processes of assessment and ask ours-
elves what we are assessing. It may not be enough to encourage students
to engage with the academic ‘content’ of the conferences; we need to focus
more specifically on developing students’ literacy in terms of their own
learning, which must include a reflective approach to academic content.

There are, of course, students such as H802 where it is more difficult to
make a distinction between content and the process of reactivity. In courses
such as this, therefore, it may be easier to develop such a reflective
approach. In others, such as A2EQ, where the academic content is more
strongly delimited, we need to explore further the ways in which features

of the technology are directly implicated in the kinds of propositional kno-

ledge that students are constructing in conferences.

Traditionally, conferences are assessable (see Chapter 1). Learning is
seen as progress and students are encouraged to take advantage of the written
records that they have access to on the conference. They need to be able
to emerge together new and more traditional literacy practices — that’s how
this is reflected in writing to the conference, and ‘traditional’ being concerned
with practices such as putting off contributions so that these can be high-
lighted and annotated for future use. For example, some students on
H802 talked about printing out all the conference postings and keeping
them for reference use as a means of assessed writing. We have seen that
the major advantage of conferencing for students is that it can allow a reflexive
engagement with learning through writing. It creates a written record that
students can return to at their leisure throughout the course.

I am aware that this chapter has raised questions which have not been
answered. In order to harness the potential of using computer conferencing
for learning we probably need to understand much more than we do at
present about these written genres. One danger is that if students use the
conference appears ineffective from the tutor’s point of view, so much
emphasis may be placed upon enhancing and improving student informa-
tion handling skills, much in the way that others in this volume refer to the
study skills based approaches being taken towards students writing more
generally (see Baynham, Chapter 1; Lea and Street, Chapter 2). What we are
really beginning to explore here is the relationship between epistemology
and writing in these new multimedia learning environments and the
consequences that this exploration might have for rethinking assessment.
Hopefully, this kind of exploration will enable both students and tutors to
benefit from these new writing spaces for learning.
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, and that it is their hands that do the thinking. They innervate through the experience of moving in space, to that space, to ideas, to music, and to other dancers within that space: the documentation of those intentions records their experience. While dance students in an university writing course are confident about their own practice, with its starting point of physical movement and its interplay of heights of spatial awareness, sensitivity to physical relationships, concentration, teamwork, and an experiential approach, they are often unsure about the formal writing tasks they encounter. The aim of this chapter is to explore the tensions and relations between the creative, physical work of dance and the formal writing requirements of the higher education context in which that work takes place.

The first part of the chapter is based on interviews and essays submitted by students on work on the use of dance to teach writing. The second part draws on my own experience of teaching a 'writing and dance' module for final year dance students. This is a module through which I try to improve the writing ability of my students: to help them to be more skillful writers. One of the questions that I ask them to consider is 'how do you write?' and how that relates to the way you are thinking about things. The third part focuses on the way in which dance students learn to write, and how those experiences might be different from those of other students in the arts.

I mean when I started it I expected, what I wanted to see out of it was a passion for that piece and then I marked all the pieces with a passion for their piece with good marks, and the others low marks and I got it back all right, now it's a lot harder to look like the like the good introduction, that's quite critically written as a piece...critical commentary...the conclusion...

It is one conclusion of this chapter that the distinction between choreography and writing is as much to do with perceptions of the differences as with an actual radical distinction between the two. There is, for example, a certain irony in the move towards getting stylistic and structural advice for writing when she is helping students to make a dance—it is a previous consideration of style and structure that she brings to their attention. Although 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 feel', an idea of 'how they feel' about the person, because in the person's 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: there is no expert, a practitioner as well as a teacher in academic writing, the is a novice relying on a basic, perhaps superficially understood, shorthand: 'don't use it', have a good introduction, conclusion...

Each writer only sees as far as her understanding students understand what making an essay involves, other more elusive qualities govern success. The essay title students were asked to respond to in choreography provide clues—though no more than clues—to embedded academic rules and rationales. These titles had been set not by the choreographer nor by her pre-arrangement, 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 used particular movement vocabulary and movement quality to realise your dance idea. How did you choose and develop your dance language and how best did it set the source idea? Illustrate your answer to this question from known works.

The move, 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 experience:

I think I captured most of what the dance was about. But before I had to write about two other people as well. So I think it was difficult to focus on my work. This is my dance and now I'm talking about two other completely different people who have nothing to do with my piece. They didn't do anything. I mean if I didn't have any ideas from them, I didn't use their themes or anything. I felt it detracted from my idea. It felt as though it was three pieces in the end. The difficulty Hannah experienced was not concerned with 'beginnings, middles and endings' but with questions about the purpose of the writing, its rhetorical and epistemological orientation. These considerations relate to the ways in which Hannah sees her work as a personal and individuated dance.
about making dance) are part of its (and her) conventionalization into the discourse (Get 1996) of dance.

Legitimating through writing

So much for the personal identity project of making a dance and becoming a choreographer; within the higher education context, publication and conventionalization processes are only partly achieved through making in the act form 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, to argue for, the universality of something (a concern in composition, a philosophical idea, a dance), where ‘universality’ is understood, as Harris (1998) suggests, not as ‘hardwired’ or ‘built into the bones’ (Harris and Geider 1988: 288), but as deriving from orientation to, and distinctiveness from, some established knowledge or stock of ideas. Geider notes that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalised reality) and transparency (explanations of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing, what Olson (1977) refers to as the 'explanatory technique', Kajanto and Geider (1996: 195) comment that in Western academic contexts 'a notion of exploration must be constrained through a process of writing'. Such a writing system makes a claim on behalf of the exploration system (which in this case is the choreography). It

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the relationships with dance precedent and authority. Part of the act 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 dancer, they need to step into a role as makers of essays. Both activities involve a making process; both also have compelling outcomes that are in some sense a commitment, a mattering of how things are. The performance of a piece in front of an audience is comparable to the presentation of an essay; in its 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 encompassed 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 production". It was based on a conception that the confidence the students experienced in their personal and creative practice as dancers and choreographers could help tackle the insease and distance often associated with formal writing tasks. The aim was to suggest to students that the process of composing writing shares similarities with the process of making dance. A notion of making, in the playful manipulation of form, was used to underpin both activities.

The module involved students in exercises that focused on organisation and selection — the way things fit together or do not — as ways of generating meanings. By physically rearranging objects according to particular criteria, students used to think about ordering in categories, sequences and hierarchies and in patterns that spelled out the relationships of parts to a whole. On one occasion the 70 students in the group were asked to arrange themselves according to the colour of clothes they were wearing. Where white tops were separated in terms of coverage and elaboration — sleeveless, with short sleeves, with long sleeves, with long collars — elements that did not fit in the overall sequence of colour 'paragraphs' had to be excluded. A similar task for a theory class was given in terms of: "What is the overall sequence of 'paragraphs' that you would construct in the dance you make?". What was made clear was that having defined ranges and boundaries — "paragraphs" — multicoloured pieces incorporating all the colour ideas were "conclusions". The relationships between ideas, then, made one play with the raw material and make their own discoveries about the way it could be shaped and sequenced as criteria emerged. The students were engaged in processes that the choreographer Laban has as necessary to the formal

publicities, in explicit verbal form, in gesturing, or, in Harris' terms, in potential for conventionalization into the public/collective realm.

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

This piece [Alley's To Bird with Love] is similar in structure to the second section of "How Could the Sun", Alley's dancers begin the piece by entering gradually on one side with their focus on the floor rather than on those around them. As more enter, the stage fills and the atmosphere picks up into a build, softly moving now of a dancer's dancing in and out of smooth, linear moved and movements.

Unlike To Bird with Love, the actual dance steps of this piece were kept relatively simple, which allowed the use of more complex structurization 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 of both the audience and the dancers themselves experiencing the piece. By using a strong element of naturalism, both in the general structure of the dance and as the performance of the moves, it allowed for the right timing to be taken from it both by dancers and audience, simpler because of the physical being put into it. Though much of the time it was used, possibly the most important of emotions, this is the same way in which Peau Rausch uses reality in her work. In 1986, for example, she has one dancer running, circling the stage 30 or 40 times, shouting the words 'I'm tired'. The dancer does not have to feel any fatigue to the audience, because the genuinely is tired, and the audience do not have to allow for any kind of artistic licence to be used by the choreographer, and accept that she would be tired — they don't have to because they know she really is exhausted.

Elle puts her piece into dialogue with the other pieces she has chosen. She shows, for example, how Alley's work is both 'like' and 'unlike' her own. She abstracts from details of a work to show the primary concerns — in composition, the transitions between the 'phases' (Kajanto and Geider 1988: 288) — but as deriving from orientation to, and distinctiveness from, some established knowledge, some stock of ideas. Kajanto notes that the academic conventions for making knowledge require both warranting (reference to a conventionalised reality) and transparency (explanations of assumptions, meanings and reasoning). Transparency in particular is a feature of academic writing, what Olson (1977) refers to as the 'explanatory technique' (Kajanto and Geider 1996: 195). Comment that in Western academic contexts 'a system of exploration must be constrained through a process of writing'. Such a writing system makes a claim on behalf of the exploration system (which in this case is the choreography). It
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I felt that that was a waste of time because there was no idea, no ground at that time of why you needed these skills. Actually, I have learnt over the years that when you had essay questions that you needed to work on... would actually help you a lot. Even now, when we have to develop an argument... I have a 10,000 word dissertation due on Monday and I am really struggling with it.

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

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

Although a number of students felt liberated by the opportunity to discuss their formal writing with others from the breadth of dance, others wanted any writing support to come from tutors within their own discipline communities. They anticipated their own successes in writing to the help of a tutor who was a dancer, but who also represented academic authority in an intense way ‘because she writes books’. From their descriptions, this tutor seemed to treat the two practices of choreography and writing as quite separate activities. Discussions with her had, these students claimed, never reached the shared process of creative construction in the making of writing and the making of dance – a reminder that it is quite possible for dance students to become successful writers without recourse to analogy with dance.

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

They worry tremendously about the writing. And I think that that they see it as a different kind of activity from what we’ve been doing all the session [discussion of videos of dance performances]. . . . They see it as a different kind of activity which is somehow distanced from them.

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

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to the staff and students of the School of Dance. All student names have been changed. Thanks too, to the LeedsBeckett staff who are funding the project ‘Improving the Quality of Argument in Higher Education: music at Sheffield University during 1990-92’ which is part of the conference of the Humanities and Arts Higher Education Network on 12 October 1996, and published in conference proceedings.

Notes

1. The project is entitled ‘Improving the Quality of Argument in Higher Education’. It is funded by the LeedsBeckett Trust and based at LeedsBeckett University, (1990-93) (see Mitchell, 1994).

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

3. This list has similarities with that proposed by Heath (1985) in her analysis of the approach that children who have been told bedtime stories seem to use (explain, break down into small facts, note academic features and receptiveness is necessary). These approaches, she claims, lead to easy assimilation to entrance literacy – ask questions, take notes, discuss various pieces of text, write descriptive prose, review and feed back.

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

Phyllis Creme

Is there a place and space for the expression of the ‘personal’, and is it relevant in higher education? Halliday (1987) argues that the need for personal development and creativity in the study and writing of academic disciplines by students and tutors. These are important questions for students trying to find their own sense of identity as students in higher education, as well as for their tutors who may have various and sometimes conflicting models of their task as teachers. In this chapter I compare the different meanings attached to the notion of the ‘personal’ in the context of learning journals used in a disciplinary and an interdisciplinary course. By ‘learning journals’ I refer to what are variously called, for instance, ‘reflective journals’, ‘study diaries’ and ‘learning logs’, which is 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 rather innocuous suggestion to students to make use of their personal positions was thrown up by our work in an action research project on the uses of ‘new forms of student writing’ that were introduced alongside traditional essays in courses taught by social anthropology faculty at Sussex University. The research was funded by a U.K. Higher Education Funding Council ‘Teaching and Learning Development’ project administered by the National Network for Teaching and Learning Anthropology in 1995-98. The study was designed to look at the impact on student learning of the new forms of writing, all of which can be defined as some kind of learning journal, although they differed from course to course in important ways. The two courses that I discuss in this 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 deads course included writing in space as part of its main teaching strategy. It was designed and taught by a member of the social anthropology subject group who was based in the School of Cultural and Community Studies, at Sussex, the
The research

Taking an 'academic literacies' approach, informed, for example, by research carried out by Lea and Street (Chapter 2), I aimed to place the student's writing in the context of the pedagogical and institutional setting in which it was produced. From the start, therefore, I was looking at the purposes and rationale for the introduction of the journals and how they were used. The research was guided by the following set of epistemological assumptions about their courses, and their attitudes to the journals, perceptions, and experiences of 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 themselves in ways similar or unique to their own courses that many value 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 to each of their respective courses. However, the extent to which this potential was realized in practice varied considerably -- not only for individual students, but also in terms of the journals, methods of integrating them into the course, teaching and feedback processes. Here I draw out some generalizations drawn from the research data which I believe are relevant for future practice.

First, give students an opportunity to write regularly and at length, allowing them to develop their ideas and writing skills. It is a theme of this book that writing is a major means by which students construct their disciplinary knowledge. The idea that writing discursively, critically and at length helps to develop student understanding and helps build up a conceptual base, recalls Perry Ellis's (1981) work on 'free writing', getting students to write 'without stopping' as a way of 'breaking up the writing process', has been proved effective in many situations, including teaching writing. Students were taught to keep a regular writing journal, using foregrounded the idea of writing as a process and a tool for learning rather than as a product and occasional demonstration of knowledge. As a major tool, the major purpose of the journals was to 'make the process of learning visible' both to the student themselves and to those reading and assessing them.

Second, writing journals enabled students to construct a 'map' of the complex structures and relationships in a course or range of material. One of the reasons that I was interested in introducing learning journals was that they asked students 'to make connections' between ideas within the course and across modules, and this was a recurring theme in students' discussion about their writing. Discursive writing is often more effective than, for example, seminar discussion because it can be a cumulative and progressive process of meaning-making that produces a visible, substantial record which can be revised and, as appropriate, annotated. 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 reader of work in progress. Moreover, I felt that it was easier to trace the developments in their learning from an outsider's perspective.

Third, writing journals encouraged students to think about their writing. Research into academic writing genres shows, for example, that forms of writing which are intrinsically linked with the construction of knowledge, how and why they are used, and how they determine the ways of thinking. As Baerum (1991: 174) puts it: 'The problem of choosing which words to put in a page looks toward a whole world rather than inward to a contained technology'. For the student I worked with, the front line of their 'whole world' was represented by a common analysis of what knowledge and the writing was equal to. However, the point was not that they were told to write, but that they actively wrote, that they wrote from everyone else as students to write a 'constitutes', included 'structure','facil value, background, revises, conclusion, interpretation, references and bibliography'. The essay needs to have a 'tidal flow' which 'takes away argument from point to point'. The introduction needs to act as a stimulus to the reader. In the end the essay is about "writing to..."
and in their own autobiographies, new forms of writing enable students to make new kinds of connections between their lives, the lessons, the text they are reading and some essential and irreversible component of the self... By reflecting on their knowledge and experience, these students are revealing their own boundaries and their self-awareness. The knowledge and experience gained through this process can be used to construct a new understanding of themselves and their world. This focus on learning as a personal experience is at the heart of the personal experience in writing.

(Mitchell 1989; emphasis added)

On the development of the students' 'own voice as scholars' and terms such as 'originality', 'individuality' and 'creativity', which were also the subject of 'literary debate', the report points to a mismatch between students' understanding of 'originality' as the 'ideal of personal knowledge' and anthropological notions of change 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 does not.

A 'creative' or 'individual' essay identifies new connections 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 1989)

I have quoted this report at length because it is clear that 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 anthropological course. The report reflected that there was an impact on the students' attitudes to their writing, and in turn influenced the students' approach.

A study of the personal in terms of writing is given a different gloss by Hackett (1989), who posits a way of conceiving the (academic) writer's 'identity' as different from the writing 'self': the 'autobiographical self' — comprising the identity the writer brings to an act of writing; the 'authentic self', which is the source of authority and authority that can be discerned by the reader, and which may be experienced by the writer as 'ownership' and control of the self; and the 'discursive self' that is inscribed in the specific and historical context of the text itself. Hackett describes some of the discursive characteristics of acceptable academic writing that appear in students' essays, as well as the consequences and general characteristics of a broader level of presentation, the construction of a case and the questioning of the assumptions. The adaptability of writing in academic settings positions the writer into taking on particular ways of knowing and thinking that do not resemble personal knowledge or experience. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of the introduction of different forms of writing was to provide a range of different modes of writing, as well as the development of the self. Another way of putting this is that offering different forms of writing expands the range of the discursive world that students can access, and that the more personal discourse of the journal allows 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 history. I do not want to suggest that there is a large difference between the aims of the new writing on the two courses, for they had much in common in their intentions of engaging students with the written material. Nevertheless, the differences were marked and had important effects on the students' experience.

The 'new writing' on the two courses had different titles that refer more closely to three different purposes as the tutors saw them: the Journal of Study and the Death Journal. The second-year political anthropology course was seen as an important theoretical foundation to the final-year option that demanded a greater degree of independence in work on the part of the student 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 to fruition — tutors spoke of qualitative shifts in student work at this point. The death course was seen as foundational in a different sense: an introduction to the discipline in the first term and the first of the degree. The death course was less focused on introducing students to academic practices, which also involved a shift in students' conceptual position. Making use of the 'personal' as a way of introducing writing had different meanings according to the different values and epistemological framework of the discipline-specific and the interdisciplinary course. To some extent — as a course taught by a social anthropologist — these differences were also reflected in the title of the course and the death of the tutor discussed earlier, as I consider later. The Journal of Study was seen as a way of using the personal to develop students' anthropological understanding of the world, whereas the Death Journal was seen as an additional course that was more focused on the personal and the student's own social experience.

The Record of Study

The political anthropology course handouts introduced the Record of Study in the following way:

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

It is designed to encourage reflectivity about your own learning.

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

This indicates how the Record of Study was intended to reflect in title: its major role is to summarise the tutor's expression: to develop the students' understanding of the concepts presented in the course — concepts that themselves changed and were seen over time, in accordance with changing theoretical positions. The tutors' thinking in introducing the Record of Study was more clearly in an interview I had with the course convenor.

We wanted students to start their records of study with a statement about what they expected of the course, and what their first 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 understanding of these concepts running through the course were evolving. [We expected that] this would give them some sense of achievement, some sense of confidence in their own learning and also provide a vehicle for reflecting and connecting similar arguments found in different contexts and seeing that there was some cumulative aspect to their learning. Finally, we wanted them to be reflective in another sense, in that they could incorporate their experience 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-maker, trying to grasp new ideas, and as a 'reader' who thinks about her own position with regard to the course material. In this context the personal is to do with the students' intellectual stance and their social/political identity. The reason the tutors saw 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 in which they might engage effectively and meaningfully with the task of writing the records of study, as a number explained me in discussion. Here is an extract from one record of study:

The Political in University Writing

We had great difficulty in defining what a society was and weren't sure, for example, whether there were any particular areas or whether there had been their own. This is the now famous bubble theory bubble wasn't there — maybe an individual can be part of a 'subculture' or 'sub societies' 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 satisfying. So I suppose having to write a 1,000 word piece on a pretty side subject forced me to evaluate relevant information, grasp similar and opposing concepts and avoid wandering off.

The writer is 'taking through' his thinking about the ideas presented in the course, which are interpreted with comments about his own way of studying and doing the assignments, his attitude to the readings and to the course generally. In the first paragraph he expresses possibilities and doubts about terms, and in the process makes 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 curriculum, and in the subject group, are not as relevantly stated above, which particularly stressed students' conceptual development, and less what was written in the spilt timeline of study this student does note 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 assimilation. The autobiographical self, to use Hackett's terminology, that comes through in this writing is that of an engaged student of the course. The essence of this self is recorded in terms of studying and learning in the passage about the writer's problem in 'identifying with the subject'. The course also demonstrates a confident autonomous self — the writer's sense of authority — which is expressed, for example, in the slightly playful use of language in his own framing of the fragment of the bubble theory, and the almost intimate address to the reader/tutor 'maybe you've noticed...'

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 programs 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 place in society through modes of imagination and comprehension of the social sciences, literature and the arts.

The report 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 "scriptbook" format was suggested].

- consider contemporary issues surrounding death and their own thoughts on these.

- reflect on "personal" encounters with death or dying.

- reflect on assigned readings.

- "read across" texts... make links between different readings on the course.

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

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

One of the main things I'm trying to get them to do is to challenge, to challenge to challenge, to challenge common-sense views about what being a single person can do... to get them to realize that there are all kinds of ways... and to see that as a necessary step to a critical perspective.

I ask them to think about the different writing genres... I try to encourage people to read beyond the individual text to get some of the experiences of being a scholar. In terms of the use of the personal, she added another dimension:

I am being surprised by the creativity of my students... I think I'm also interested in helping students to find their voice. I'm trying to focus on ways to get them to get the confidence of seeing that they don't just have to say what I said.

The use of the terms "voice" and "confidence" suggests a more personal and disciplined approach than the discussion of similar terrain in

being included in the death journal coursework. Parity it is an evolution of the Romantic view of an authentic, individual self that persisted even in this course concerned with the social construction of selves. As Graham (1993) points out, a sense of the "personal" as an "authentic" individual voice was strongly present in work on writing in education in the UK in the 1970s (for example, Brem 1979). Graham associates this with the idea, now in retirement, of an authentic, specific and unique self-waking to be re-awakened and expressed, usually through imaginative writing. This sense of thinking about writing in education inferred generations of English teachers in the UK and particularly in the LKS.

The notion of the authentic single voice has tended to have been re-asserted by, for example, the "subject" in post-structuralist literary theory, or in the notion of multiple identities, in the way that bodies express different identities. The way this point of view, every act of writing, which can never escape the assumption of a conscious self (as Kozoli terms it), is an interpretative construct and constantly, every language act also positions the writer. As Usher (1993: 125) joins it, even the most personal meanings, in the sense that is most authentically, are discourse articulations, interpretations through which tradition speaks and the "I" is spoken of. This view of language as social practice also informs the stance. Indeed, it fits with some of the student experience of writing the journals. Nevertheless, as Brem points out, the possibility of, and the need for, 'authenticity' in writing is strongly felt by student writers, whether in source might be.

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 readily spoke of differences in their different writing 'I's', the impression of 'writing for myself' in the journals contrasted for many with the need to adapt to 'academic' ways of writing. That sense of "writing for myself" might be variously interpreted... - for example, in terms of a sense of an 'essential self', or of its terms of identities that felt more 'real' to the student, perhaps framed by a developmental or longitudinal sense, 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 different senses of the defensive. In the course context, writing a journal posed as many difficulties as any kind of writing might, and also sought guidelines on "what to write", which they had to consider in relation to their readers and the course setting. This 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
impression of being able to express the personal remained for them, and it was frequently validated by a strong authoreal voice in their journals. The death journals explicitly invited aspects of the student's own experience to be brought in as a 'legitmate' part of the teaching and learning setting. Since death is, as the rubric for the course put it, a 'universal experience', it was a topic that everyone could, if they wished, engage with and relate to. One student expressed her belief that 'everyone who chose this course has a story to tell'. For this student – and it was true to a greater or lesser extent of many of the students on the course – the death journal was a place for telling these personal stories in a context that attempted to integrate the personal and the academic approach.

Directions

I am suggesting that the careful use of learning journals can offer a rather liberating opportunity for students to chart their own course through their studying in higher education. The records of study and the death journals were different from each other because their contexts were different, but they also had elements in common. By giving greater scope for the personal in the academic setting they allowed students 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 authoreal 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 teacher and student perceptions of the boundaries of higher education. There are many courses for which learning journals would be useful. However, the different uses of the idea of the personal in the two courses I have looked at demonstrate how the introduction of learning journals needs to be thought through as carefully as any other curriculum innovation within any particular course. Among the issues to be considered are the following:

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

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

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Writing in Postgraduate Teacher Training: A Question of Identity
Mary Scott

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

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

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

Popular discourse offers many examples of the analytical evaluations which 'theory' and 'practice' currently tend to generate - the 'theoretical' and the 'practical', the 'head' and the 'common-sense'. Practice as literature, in the way of 'professional' and 'non-professional' is intrinsically and irremediably associated with high standards, while theory is regarded as remote from the 'real' and thus as falling through relevance to prepare learners for their future roles and tasks. In this way the perception of higher education institutions as 'theatre of education' would be removed that was forced to remove itself from the 'real' world of the 'reality' to which it was committed.

A brief retrospect

Before the introduction of formal partnerships between schools and institutions of higher education, PGCE students were offered few written guidelines concerning the assignments they had to produce for assessments. The main requirement was that they should relate theory to practice in an 'essay'. This specification had as its implicit corollary an idealized identity for the teacher trainee. The PGCE student was assumed to be an active and independent learner who would benefit from considerable freedom to pursue her own particular areas of interest - this being regarded as the pathway to the foundation of her identity as an active, creative and autonomous practitioner, her agency. In other words, the student writer was expected to present dispositional positions which progressive pedagogy advised her to foster in learners in schools. This perception of learner as active and autonomous凶手s of knowledge correlated with a view of writing which reaches back to the Romantic period and emphasizes creativity and individual expression in meaning-making.

The initial assessment of the students' assignments was consistent with this emphasis. Though the prominence of minimal criteria might seem to allow students a number of possibilities, the assignments which were included 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 abstractness of theory was turned out in concrete such as vignettes from classrooms, or transcripts of recorded talk, or excerpts from policy documents. Consequently, though the assignments were referred to as 'essays', the most successful tended to be more like essays in which the students used theory in order to develop an individually distinctive and personally relevant perspective on some aspect of educational practice. It was, furthermore, a perspective which avoided simplistic conclusions instead it showed an awareness of complexity and an attention to diverse answers.

The examiners' comments on the highly rated assignments added another dimension to this emphasis on individual and personally relevant meaning-making. The assignments were treated as if they were narratives of the writer's subjectivity - a subjectivity regarded implicitly, if not explicitly, as constituting the trainee teacher's ideal identity and the source of her agency in the classroom. The examiners referred, for example, to students' 'appropriateness of understanding', and to their being 'sensitive and knowledgeable', 'imaginative' and 'insightful'. There were some references to traditional academic criteria such as 'the clarity of language', 'the evidence of wider 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.

Writing in Postgraduate Teacher Training

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

This is clearly an enthusiastic and hardworking student with considerable imagination and promise who should do well in her future career. This tendency to treat the students' texts as indices of their identity is problematic. However, the problem should not be seen as deriving solely from a possible mismatch between the qualities suggested by an individual student's assignment and those the student might be expected to demonstrate in the classroom. Such an emphasis and the challenge which it sets are not necessarily intrinsically linked. The potential of the 'complementary' character of such assignments appears to be underused, for the sake of the limitations of the PGCE course. For example, the students' assignments as a text being shaped by the writer; in short, in an example of written discourse (Boothman 1981). 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 some tensions and problems.

A new context: teacher training as a partnership

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

The recognition of how the students' assignments advanced some students while disadvantaging others was a factor which led to the development of new, more detailed guidelines. However, as I shall indicate below, the introduction of the summative requirement that tutor teachers spend two-thirds of their time in schools was a more immediately pressing influence: teachers in schools were to be involved in advising students on their professional studies assignments. Because they did not have a shared understanding of what was expected of students, a more detailed and explicit specification was required. Adopting an even wider perspective, I see a possible link between the more detailed character of the new guidelines and a change in the general perception of learners and learning in higher education. The new guidelines can be said to reflect a growing emphasis in UK universities on the importance of pedagogy — an emphasis which has led to an insistence that summative criteria be made explicit to students. A selective plundering of Bernstein's (1986) theories once again helps me to crystallize this change of forms 'performance', a term which subsumes 'specialized output' and the 'explicit role for complying', has replaced 'compliance'. To put it another way, by drawing on the current government-inspired language of teacher training 'performance' has been used to 'professionalize' the coursework.

However, in the institution in which I work the greater involvement of students in the planning of their assignments was largely seen as a welcome opportunity to develop an improved PGCHE course in which theory and practice could be more closely integrated. To emphasize the value of the new criteria of participation in the life of the school, 'student teachers' were renamed 'beginning teachers'. For similar reasons the 'education component' is now the 'professional studies' programme. This programme is currently based on the assumption that a teacher is engaged in a wide variety of educational aims and objectives beyond those articulated within curriculum areas. Leitores and mentors will discuss across-curricular topics such as the history of the education system, language and literacy, pupil learning and differentiation. In accordance with the aims of partnership between schools and the higher education institution, beginning teachers are at present required to carry out a 'school-focused enquiry' as well as a 'research and development' project under the supervision of teachers in their placement schools; these enquiries being partly intended as a contribution to the school on the part of the beginning teacher. The questions or problems to be addressed are decided in discussion with the teachers, but the summative criteria are provided by the training institution. These criteria are designed to indicate the 'performance' of beginning teacher training, an aim which I shall consider on later. Students have to relate theory to practice, construct an argument, appreciate the usefulness and limitations of their research methods and assess the value of their research.

The two pieces of writing object under study the limiter of the field: the anticipated audience and the writer's own self. Basewin was analysing papers by well-known academics (J. D. Watson and J. H. B. Crick), Robert K. Merton, and Geoffrey H. Hartman, who were on present, but new knowledge, but the difference between professional academic writers and students is actually an advantage in the process of bringing the earlier education into the potential: the particular concerns of the student's situation as writers. In other words, as this reference to the student's indicators, I seek to avoid the Romantic view of the writer which I outlined above and associated with 'competence'. In place of the detached, rational, creative individual whose writing is measured as the expression of certain 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.

In Basewin's paper the four contexts both impose a coherence on the three examples of academic discourse which he discusses, and simultane- ously, make the differences in thinking and writing of the three texts. The 'object under study' — the sequence of DNA, the ambivalence of science, and Western thought — can be represented in terms of their mobility: DNA is an object that exists in the world; the ambivalence of science is, however, a concept which is argued for; and Western thought is the meditations of Hartman's 'subjective recreation of the poetic moment'. It is from these differences in the 'object under study' that Basewin largely derives his account of the differences in the other contexts. The use of the literature of the field and the role of the anticipated audience (in this case the writer's peers) are less clearly visible in the connections he makes with, and between, the object of study, the literature of the field and the anticipated reader.

The 'object under study' seems clear at first glance. The writer tells us in her brief abstract that the assignment 'looks at some of the theories in the areas of language and learning, learning acquisition and bilingualism in the mainstream, and their common currency'. However, in the full statement of the assignment the writer says that her primary concern is not with theory, but rather with its role in relation to practice. Practice comes more sharply into focus in the next sentence of the abstract: beginning teacher A states that she 'also looks at the ways in which the two are applied to, and in the eyes of bilingual learners, needs, and in the school's policy statement and recommendations for good practice'. The assignment is now restricted to 'the way in which the school's policy statement is implemented when, in the sentence that follows, A tells her readers that she is in search of "models of good pedagogy" which can inform her future teaching'. This hints of anthropography recurrently draws theory and practice into an alliance within a subsuming and personally pertinent object of study — the nature and sources of the teacher's agency in the classroom. As will emerge later, agency (and also identity) here turns on a clash of discourses in which the meanings and values which A finds in her reading compete with those which she encounters in the world of the school.

As a point this return to Basewin's paper can serve to highlight the problematic and demanding nature of the beginning teacher's task as an assignment writer. Basewin's academics such. Both with the assignment task which they defined in relation to procedures and knowledge in their well-established fields. The beginning teacher, on the other hand, has to create the object of study within the demands and expectations of the higher education institutions and the school. The implications of this dual situation are more clearly traceable within A's assignment when her use of the literature of the field is brought into focus. It is clear that she finds her theoretical perspective — a perspective which matches Bernstein's description of 'competence'. This is evident in the assignment's full but concise summaries of the emphasis which she places on the pedagogical corollary of this view of knowledge and its implications for the teacher's 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 strives to conceal is the actual nature of A's problem. While the beginning teacher will not discover teaching expertise, I would suggest that her difficulties currently derive from comparing identities which turn on a conflict between competence and performance. On the one hand, she endorses competence-oriented discourses which locate agency in an empowering personal meaning-making (in, for instance, her self-embodiment); on the other hand, she is also a practising teacher encountering performance-oriented discourses such as 'transferable skills'. However, since she assumes that competence discourses should translate into rules for the realization of specialized outcomes, she sees no contradiction between 'personal meaning-making' and 'transferable skills' or between Lortie's (1975) competence view of communication and the performance strategies of the communicative approach to language teaching to which she refers appropriately 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 the way I have described as originating in the student. Her assignment is thoughtful and perceptive, and the back-and-forth exchanges which I have looked at and written about are concerned with being a beginning teacher who spends most of her time in school inevitable result in a strongly felt need for 'answers', and no time for reading. Thus, whereas in the early 1950s the PGCE's primary focus was on teaching practice, more recently there is a greater emphasis on the personal relationships between the student and the teacher. Teaching practice is now more important than teaching technique, and the results suggest that the 'object under study' is initially 'differentiation targeting different abilities', the meaning of this concept is dealt with briefly - a definition shows from Capel (at ed.) (1995) soon getting it out of the way.

Beginning teacher B's assignment

Beginning teacher B experienced the same dual discomforts as beginning teacher A, but handled it differently in her assignment. Whereas A is primarily concerned with the application of theory to practical teaching, B concentrates on practice and the conflicts which inevitably arise. The result is that B's assignment is more of a 'real' than theory. Throughout the assignment, the 'object under study' is initially 'differentiation targeting different abilities', the meaning of this concept is dealt with briefly - a definition shows from Capel (at ed.) (1995) soon getting it out of the way.

Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, I turn finally to issues of pedagogy which rest on my selective borrowing and reconfiguring of 'competence' and 'performance'. To some extent it is identified with an 'individuated' competence which can imply that writing cannot be taught. 'Performance', on the other hand, is concerned with the application of rules of realization or 'transferable skills'. An instance is that the 'competence' view of the student writer, while also raising the issue of 'professional' performance. Here, the difference is a matter of scale; that is, a detailed analysis of the written text, each of these levels of analysis/current practices in terms of competence theory; that is, a detailed analysis of the written text, each of these levels of analysis/Capel (at ed.) (1995) lends itself to the process of transformation.

In contrast with A, teacher C, who would include them primarily for herself, it becomes clear that she regarded her main audience as those in the beginning teacher's support network. She sees herself as an instrument, a demonstration of her didactic nature of presentation. For example, she asks questions such as 'what is the assignment?, and 'What is differentiation?', and then provides the answers.

As the discussion above has already suggested, the image of the 'teacher's own self' which emerges from B's assignment is primarily that of an apparatus for the delivery of skills and practice. In the beginning teacher, the 'object under study' is initially 'differentiation targeting different abilities', the meaning of this concept is dealt with briefly - a definition shows from Capel (at ed.) (1995) soon getting it out of the way.
A Question of Attribution: The Indeterminacy of ‘Learning from Experience’

Simon Purdie

Introduction

Reading and marking seen that students have written can be a dispiriting experience. Sometimes it seems that key points of the course have not registered in the students’ minds. Often the texts seem even to lack a basic knowledge of 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 criticisms, and accompanying calls that ‘something should be done’, is not actually helpful either to tutors or to students in understanding the difficulties they face in moving forward. Understanding unsuccessful student writing, in a way that offers practical insight and ways forward, is one of the key challenges for writing research.

What is frustrating about researching student writing as a participant observer is the opportunity to 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 understand the origins of the unsuccessful aspects of students’ texts.

Like many other researchers, I often find that apparent problems in student writing do not simply represent a lack of skills, knowledge or understanding by students. Unsuccessful texts are often the result of students drawing on familiar ways of learning and writing that have served them well elsewhere, in their previous education, or in other areas of their lives. In the words of Shulzynsky (1977) the students’ unsuccessful text potentially have a ‘rational’ or ‘logic’. We need to understand this if we want to know what further guidance students may need. And in doing so, we may find that we abandon the common view of any teaching of writing as somehow ‘remediating’ another teaching what students should have learned before (Hull and Rose 1999; Soskis 1990; Hull 1997).

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

Equally, I am struck by just how difficult it is for tutors to make explicit what is required. Firstly, what is required seems so familiar and obvious to the tutor. Indeed, most of our own learning has been ‘on the job’, and may have remained very implicit. Secondly, there is actually no recipe to writing, say, an ‘essay’ or a ‘financial audit’. For good reasons, such texts are not set all the same. Thirdly, even when we become aware of the students’ need for more detailed guidance, we can’t feel that we are walking a tightrope between giving this guidance, and feeling we are ‘spoon-feeding’ the students.

In some courses, there is a belief that part of the challenge is that students should work out what is required. Within vocational courses in particular, part of the challenge is that students learn how to work out what is required within a particular professional scenario.

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

My argument is that learning from an experience in any context involves working out what aspects of its can be taken as generally significant, and what should be regarded as more particular. We cannot assume that the significance of an experience is self-evident. For example, within vocational education, where an experience or activity is inextricably linked to both the educational and the professional contexts, the process of learning from an experience involves working out what aspects of it can be taken as offering insight into the profession, and what should be regarded as being a consequence of doing it within the classroom. The implication is that for students to understand a particular activity or experience in the way we intend, we need to make explicit the significance that we attach to it.

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

A question of attribution

Within traditional academic education

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

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

Similar questions also arise within other disciplines, and particularly when students are studying in several disciplines at once. For example, sociology, philosophy, English and linguistics typically have 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 "bluff" in their attempts to answer questions that require original thought. This requires not only the practice of science but also the creative process of "finding things out." Among these "new science" contexts, which are often engaged in by students in groups of mixed disciplines, and the tutors are under pressure to claim that the activities and experience they provide have the kind of general relevance implied by the notion of "skills." This may create some ambiguity in the attribution of particular activities (within, say, an "essay" or "tutorial") to "disciplines in general" or to specific disciplines and sub-disciplines.

Within science education

Within science education, the notion of "learning by doing" or "learning by experience" has become almost the dominant pedagogy. Students learn not only the practice of science but also the creative process of "finding things out." Among these "new science" contexts, which are often engaged in by students in groups of mixed disciplines, and the tutors are under pressure to claim that the activities and experience they provide have the kind of general relevance implied by the notion of "skills." This may create some ambiguity in the attribution of particular activities (within, say, an "essay" or "tutorial") to "disciplines in general" or to specific disciplines and sub-disciplines.

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 way 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 about the nature, or otherwise what the experiment is about. This is a process of assigning significance to the observation or experience (see Figure 8.2). Without guidance, understanding the significance of their experiences, the learner may attribute an experience in ways that are quite different from the understandings of their employer. Moreover, their attribution of the experiment 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 context, and in a subsequent test. (It has implications for whether they will be seen as personally successful in learning the job, and as either "tender" or "shrewd."
activity or experience to the wider profession, they will see it as an insightful 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 evolution of the students' developing understanding and learning, and to their writing.

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

Even within the lectures, talks and handouts of the tutor, there are often claims that the activity is 'real' or 'reality'-based, and that the students will be writing, say, 'a proper report', as it would do in a professional context. It is also common to hear students talking to each other in these terms. They may even come to a course with an expectation formed around the kind of professional activity in which they might be engaged in a future career. They may even be quite dismissive of an activity as 'not real', and may show 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 de-legitimising educational activities and experience. On the one hand, it is a part of a view of education in which relevance is seen narrowly in terms of preparing students for employment. On the other hand, it is part of the formal process of attributing significance to experience, and learning from it. Such talk can reveal different understandings by the tutor and students, both of the course activity and of what was required of the students' texts.

Two examples of attribution

I will cite two examples from a study of an MSc course in environmental science. The research was carried out in collaboration with the tutor, who was involved in that study. It shows that previous students' texts were frequently disappointing: this was despite his offering them 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 very uncertain and provisional nature of claims that are made in science - especially within environmental science and EEA:

- 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, in the state of data you have at the moment, you may insulate 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 EEA from the experience of trying to do one; from the challenge of trying to understand the workings of a particular local exercise from the typically limited data available, and then of trying to predict the likely environmental impacts of a future development.

His critique of most 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 dilute that oxygen levels would remain static, and thus the effects should be considered negligible.

Thus it is seen that stressing will be more pronounced nearer the pit with only a maximum increase of depth of 1.11 ft.

(Helena)

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

How do you know, and does this mean as well as:

a collection of assertions without any discussion.

A Question of Attribution

I say this because there is an unfortunate habit within education of attributing unseemly 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 that the environment 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 longer term they prevent real improvement in our collective professional practice and understanding, and undermine the expertise and value of education.

The challenge for researchers and educational managers is to avoid simiply 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 reproduce academic or professional texts from these accounts. The challenge is to try to understand the sources of difficulties and what can help.

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

EIA is an apparatus 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 port, a market or airport runway, and to communicate this to the local planning authorities. The UK has a simply called environmental assessment (EA). The course I researched involved some traditional introductory lecture input, but the focus was on students learning about EA through actually doing one, and writing one. They were given a scenario, and a scope of a provisional development proposal - in this case to extract gravel from behind 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 permission I joined their meetings, in which they were discussing what they were going to do, generally listing, and collaborating in producing the final text. I also interviewed both the tutor and the students during and after the course.

In the analysis I explored the apparent origins of aspects of the students' texts that the tutor had critiqued 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 assumptions, the understandings and the ways of talking about science and texts that they drew on in these discussions, which when combined seemed to guide them in unhelpful directions. I was interested in the origins of these, within their previous education and their experience beyond, or within the course itself and the EEA literature.

Example 2: 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 very uncertain and provisional nature of claims that are made in science - especially within environmental science and EEA:

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practice. He attributed it to the professional context. However, the students understood the uncertainty as a consequence of the constraints, practices and policies of the educational context. They attributed the lack of time and resources, and the uncertainty or inadequacy of the data, to the educational context. They therefore do not ‘experience’ this as insight into professional practice. Instead, they see it as a rather idealized notion of professional practice, somewhat devoid of context and constraints (see Figure 8.5). (Ironically, when they later enter professional practice, and are confronted with such constraints in ‘the real world’, they will look back on their education and curriculum as being idealized and not ‘real’.!) Significantly for the students’ writing, if they view the constraints such as uncertainty as belonging in the classroom, while trying to produce a text in the voice of a professional within the professional context, then it becomes impossible for them to articulate the uncertainty within the text.3

What is interesting here is the potential of this kind of talk of what is ‘real’ and not ‘real’ to derail the intended learning from the experience. Crucially the students have to view an experience as ‘real’ in order to produce the kind of report that they assume to be ‘real’.

Example 2: Understanding an instruction/activity

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

The scenario

As is typical of professional texts, environmental assessments are complex, and can have subtly different functions within different scenarios. In this course, the tutor therefore set out a scenario, and contrasted this with other scenarios they might encounter. In this scenario (an actual case), the landowners of the banks of a local estuary had made a very provisional proposal to allow a developer to extract gravel. The proposed method of extraction had not yet been decided. The planning authority was nevertheless interested in knowing what the impacts might be. The students were to take the role of independent consultants working for the planning authority at this early stage. Their task was to inform future decisions about the proposal, and to be extracted with minimum impact, and whether this was even possible.

The problematic instruction/activity

As consultants in this professional scenario they could, of course, assess the likely impact of every possible method of extraction. But clearly it would be more productive use of their time to focus on the method(s) of extraction most likely to be proposed by a future developer. (The tutor explained that this could be done by looking at the factors of being cheaper, of being least environmentally damaging, and most likely to go planning permission.) The act of selecting and therefore partly attributing to the professional context. However, in such cases, with the time constraints of the assignment they could realistically assess only one method. The act of choosing one was therefore also attributable to the educational context.

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 reaction to this is that he had already given it. He had told them that the set of data they had exactly as they might find in a professional. He told them it was ‘real’. He said it was the ‘real world’ impact assessment would be using if this development actually went ahead. It is therefore important to hear how these claims may be heard.

First, his assertions to the students that “this is real” can function, and can be heard, in different ways. In their discussion the students talked about whether aspects of the course were ‘real’. They were evidently very familiar with claims from tutors that courses were ‘real’, and regarded these quite sceptically. They saw them as part of the course claiming legitimacy for the course; the claims refine the assumption that the course is removed from the ‘realities’ 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 articulated above, the students commonly brought to the course an idealized view of science and professional practice. They drew on experience to be ‘real’ (and often they were always enough data to make claims with certainty. This combined with a wider belief that science necessarily achieves more than other than involving uncertain and contentious claims within the process of developing knowledge. They also drew on the assumption that a ‘real’ report would find equal data to achieve certainty (spaces above); it would not make uncertain claims from limited data. What the tutor had not anticipated was the resilience of these assumptions—the way in which they could be sustained by a practice of discounting experience within education as ‘not real’. In effect, the students’ idealized assumptions could not be sustained by the experience of uncertainty that he could offer. They were even able to withstand his very explicit court on uncertainty in examples of professional EIA in his lecture. The students saw these as examples of ‘what should not have happened’; they identified such experience as less rather than taking them as indicators of a wider ‘reality’ within the profession.

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

A Question of Attributions

The tutor asked the students first to think what a likely extraction technique might be, and then to focus their assessment on the likely environmental impact of this. (Because the initial ‘choice’ was only a preliminary task, he articulated it only once, within an introductory lecture.) If we look at what he actually said to them, we can see that he started, as we might expect, by explaining what they had to do in terms of the task as separate. He then said they had to think what the most probable extraction technique could be. But then, at the first mark with a <, he began to shift:

It’s only then after discussions with a variety of interested parties that the extraction technique is finally, / so it’s quite important asking you in producing an independent environmental assessment , to think, what the most probable extraction technique could be / and you could you said if you were at ‘real’, if you’ve got time, think, from a variety of techniques / then balance them against one another / but don’t have that time / what I want you to do is a group / before we’re talking to the workshop two weeks today shifted the account firmly into the classroom context. In other words, he starts by explicitly attributing the choice to professional practice and the professional context, and then shifts towards attributing these to the educational context. There is a dual attribution, in which the rationale for the choice is therefore ambiguous. Finally, with ‘agree amongst yourselves what the extraction technique is going to be’ he reasserted the instruction merely as a procedure (a move as 1995, 1993)...

After the point marked < the instructions progressively lose the link to the professional scenario. His use of “you” became ambiguous in what was he addressing them as consultants or students. His explanation “we don’t have that time” was ambiguous about the context (classroom or profession) in which to which he was attributing this time constraint. But then his talk of the ‘group’, and the deadline in the ‘workshop two weeks today’ shifted the account firmly into the classroom context. In other words, he starts by explicitly attributing the choice to professional practice and the professional context, and then shifts towards attributing these to the educational context. There is a dual attribution, in which the rationale for the choice is therefore ambiguous. Finally, with “agree amongst yourselves what the extraction technique is going to be” he reasserted the instruction merely as a procedure (Benson 1995, 1993)...

In the students’ discussions, in trying to understand this instruction, their other articulations similarly identified the procedure without the rationale. The most common reference to the instruction was

We’ve got to pick a dredger by Friday.

Interestingly, the tutorial discussions did not clarify the rationale for the choice. The tutor asked about, and the students described, the extraction method they had chosen to use, and their reasons. Their discussion was equally ambiguous about the context of the choice, and the extractivity which they were choosing. Yet neither the tutor nor I saw this ambiguity at the time.
The students' confusion, and the implications for their learning

Within the students' meetings, when they were trying to work out exactly what was going on, they were focusing on the act of cheating as extraction technique became increasingly confusing. Without a clear understanding of the rationale for this 'choice' within the context of either the classroom or professional context, it was possible for both the status of it, and the capacity in which they were taking it, to shift fluidly within their discussions, and finally in their notes.

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

The tutor's written comments on their texts reveal the significance of this in terms of the different function of their notes. They interpreted their sense for assessing decisions as if they were already made, rather than informing future decisions.

We have identified the role of tutorial Session 1 only over possible scenario not of an independent arbiter whose role is to find an acceptable way for extraction, or of if it is even possible. The view of the scenario already made out as a basis for an open discussion of the merits of different approaches.

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

Section 2. Project description

The extraction of the aggregate will be done using a bloodstream detector. One of the following methods will be used first. Work will be presented in the north end of Block 5.

Orびて the extractor has excised a suitable pp. could be loaded onto a processor. The channel bank is now going to be breached.

The main alternative to the chosen method of a bloodstream detector will be extraction using a center water detector but the engine is due to the following shoes coming.

This contrasts with a previously successful text (given to me by the tutor) as an illustration of what he wanted) in which the authors—as independent consultants—indirectly discuss "the main decision" that will need to be taken, rather than the "final decision", which is an independent analysis, 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 maintain 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' sense of shifting from this, and towards the activity of making and assessing them, represented a major leap of learning opportunity.

It is significant that making and assessing decisions is perhaps linguistically easier than seeking to express the decisions of others. If the students were to recognize and take on the more challenging function of inferring decisions, then they needed that crucial understanding of the status of their 'choice' of detector within the professional scenario. They also needed a recognition that the form and function of their text was something new and unfamiliar, which they needed to learn. It involved more than '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 texts infer rather than assess decisions. Yet 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 stagnation. These effectively threw into question both what they thought they were doing and what they thought EA was about. Their own reactions confirm their shift into a very different scenario, and a different understanding of this text rather than independent analysis, and, more broadly, that their text had become part of the final submission for planning permission, in which all the decisions had been taken.

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

Ali: this is what I did /

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

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

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

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

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

In retrospect, the students needed guidance on the ways in which the different scenarios within ERA will be told about in the lectures (involving different relations between people and between documents) actually demand different ERA texts. They needed to look at the ways in which, for example, environmental assessments achieve different functions within different types of texts. Only then could they consider the implications of these particular scenarios 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 led directly counter to the temptation in higher education to make the general claim that as an activity 'real', or reproduces 'real' professional practice, irrespective of the kind of situation (that is common in course publications, and in tutor and student talk in vocational courses) is inadequate and potentially misleading. It involves a very general attribution that may actually undermine the students in understanding the significance of particular instructions and inappropriately encourages students to put aside the diversity of professional practice, to pursue practices that are 'real', but which were nevertheless not required, not functional and not appropriate in this particular instance.

Implications for researching student writing

I started by arguing that one of the key challenges for writing research is to understand unaccomplished student writing, in a way that offers practical insight and ways forward. I have tried to illustrate the importance of attending to students' accounts of their texts, rather than simply the texts themselves, and of trying to understand the potential 'narratives' behind unaccomplished aspects of their texts. This can offer practical insight into why these might have been unaccomplished, 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 on.

In a short chapter such as this, one can only focus on a particular issue. However, it is important to note that the origins of unaccomplished writing not to claim a simple 'cause'. This is likely to have underdetermined the complex and subtle demands of the writing task, and to be simply ignored by the writers themselves. As I have argued elsewhere (Parford 1997, 1999) it is important to explore a potential network of factors that together may have enabled, promoted and sustained the students' unaccomplished understandings and writing. The question of attribution is likely to be on important element.
aspects of an activity and experience as being simply a consequence of it being within the educational context. If the observations of Edwards and Mercer (1987) and others (above) apply more widely, they may have learned from school science sometimes to dismiss their actual data or results, and report what they think "should have happened." If we want students to experience constraints on a professional activity (such as time, resources or accuracy) as a part of their experience of professional practice or science research, then we need to make the same of that experience explicit. We may need to articulate explicitly that this is a part of the intended learning. Conversely, if they need to understand some aspects of the activity or experience as being a consequence of the educational context, then we need to make that clear, too. This does not undermine the way in which other aspects of the activity can nevertheless give important insight into professional practice. After all, the educational context provides an opportunity for developing exactly the kind of explicit understanding that is needed in "on-the-job" training in the workplace.

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

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

Finally, and most importantly, we need to make explicit for students the implications of the professional scenario for the text. This is likely to seem unfathomable to the experienced tutor, but is exactly what needs to be learned. If there are new challenges involved in their writing, such as articulating uncertainty, informing a decision, or even using evidence and previous research to produce an argument, then students need some guidance about how this is done. They cannot simply deduce the linguistic form and strategies of a professional text from the task or from the scenario, and they cannot reinvent it from first principles. Without guidance about the new genre, and how it may differ from those in their experience, students may simply reproduce old familiar practices. Without guidance about the ways in which professional 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 suit 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 recognise 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. I have also removed any references to the text's source or the assumptions and values behind it. Double quotation marks are used for an actual quotation.


3. Transcript symbols used:

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

   - indicates that at this point in the extract some of the original text has been omitted.

4. The tutor's account of uncertainty in EIA drew on his experience as an environmental assessors, currently based with the district to make predictions from limited data, and his knowledge of the way in which EIA are usually based on the very limited data available about a particular local area. His account would seem to be supported within the environmental assessment literature. In a key introductory text on EA, Bissett and Townshend (1998: 188) summarise the situation as follows:...
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):

The aim of this paper is to explore the experiences of learning and writing for success and the complexities involved in this. While I use the term 'success' in this study, I am aware that it is not unproblematic both who and what determines success within and across contexts. Theorists conceptualise the university as a social/cultural/constructed framework in which it is understood that learning takes place within a contextually located process of meaning making rather than decontextualised accounts of learning.

Background and context

At UCT, certificate-based adult education provision has traditionally been non-formal. From the mid-1990s until the end of 1994, the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies offered two year-long non-formal programmes: the Community Adult Education Programme (CAEP) and the Adult Learning in the Workplace Programme (ALWP). While there was substantial overlap between the two programmes, there were important distinctions in terms of student groupings. Whereas CAEP students were predominantly community-based adult educators, Xhosa- or Afrikaans-speaking and predominantly 'black' (used to denote both cultural and 'Africans' apartheid racial classifications), the students on the ALWP were a mixture of CAEP-type students and corporate- or industry-based trainees. There was also a strong representation of white, English-speaking or Afrikaans-speaking students on the ALWP courses over the years.

In 1995, the Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, now known as the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), a new non-formal programme was offered: the Certificate in Adult Education, Training and Development (CETD) programme. Many of our students - namely adult educators/trainers - now entered the CETD programme without the normal formal requirements for entry to university study. We instituted a policy of 'alternative access' and encouraged any of our students who had completed any 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 formal 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 was also brought about by a diverse group of practitioner students on to our course, including both community-based educators and trainers and those located within corporate or industry setting. The latter group included some students who already possessed undergraduate and even postgraduate university qualifications. What interested me, therefore, was to investigate and explore what possible 'academic combination of components' (Fairclough 1992a) students might be adapting 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, and to enable them to become 'critical, reflective practitioners' (Schön 1987). While writing is by no means the only way by which this can be done, assessment is an important component of formal learning, and we attempted to integrate assessment tasks which would require a reflection on their own work (see Appendix 1).

The students understood 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 "acquire the discourse" (Gee 1990), or at least an important component of it. We recognize, however, the difficulties that students have with academic writing for assessment (see also Lee and Street, Chapter 12). Many students explore informal learning in higher education alike to this (Choi and Stierer 1991; Flower 1994; James 1995). James (1995) also argues that many students are "boundaries between the domains of assessment; grades, yet he argues that we often overlook the role that both assessment and lecturers play in "legitimising" higher education studies. This emerged in students' accounts of their learning. One student interviewed, Naomi, when asked what she felt about assessments, said that she felt it was a good thing because:

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

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

I felt it was sort of your fault that I failed the whole thing because you didn't make it clear to me exactly 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/sociologist position, looks at second-language student experiences of writing at university. She argues persuasively for an approach to learning which attempts to look at "voice or subjectivity ... [creating] meaning in the individual" (Thesen 1994: 36), yet without ignoring the social and cultural contexts in which this process takes place. The learning space in which the student is located is concerned with the ways that are produced and the ways in which students construct their academic knowledge through the production of these; and the domain of academic literacy which mediates the relationship between the other two domains. In considering these three domains, Lee argues that we be better able to introduce the different interpretations of text production and the ways in which these are gendered and cultural social contexts.

Within this frame, she highlights two approaches to learning - reformulation and new significance. The first approach is one whereby students try and reproduce course material, thereby attempting to "learn the discourse", while the latter is often an explicit attempt on the part of students to relate a course to their own wider life/word context. Academic literacy, Lee argues, is being taught, or is in doing things simultaneously in producing text, one is trying to make appropriate for assessment, yet at the same time they are trying to maintain a sense of their own identity and the validity of other ways of knowing.

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

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

Kosnik's (1996) study of adult learners in formal higher education settings highlights the importance of role in learning. Drawing on and extending the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky and others, she explores adult learners' patterns of interaction with the higher education context. She identifies four patterns of interaction - conflict, withdrawal, accommodation and transformation - all of which look at the kind of learner-teacher relationship, the kind of learner role students identify for themselves, as well as their own perceptions of what higher education learning is about. Both Lee and Kosnik argue that a role theory, as it is, leads to an understanding that students engage in one particular approach to their learning and writing experiences. I believe we need to understand that there are often multiple and even contradictory patterns which emerge in each learner's experience of learning. Negotiation and times from the margins. What is important is that students are continuously making decisions in their learning. In particular, she argues that:

this perspective makes it easy to track and understand the way discourse roles 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) expand 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 rely on the same negotiation of meaning, thereby creating meaning in the interaction of alternatives, opportunities and constraints (see Fower 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 Sput (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, in a specific context of situation, the context of culture provides the range of possibilities which are competing for dominance. What the context belongs to the task, in terms of his or her own attitudes towards it, beliefs about what is expected from the task and the purposes behind that particular task, links to the broader context of culture and affects the process and outcomes. The context of culture therefore, affects writing practices and, in turn, influences and constrains students' experiences in their academic literacy knowledge in relation to the non-academic worlds of work, community and home. Lee (1994) believes that "a central part of the learning process for students is constructed 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, the author argues that while learning often involves conversation and challenge as students increase prior knowledge and ways of writing and reading texts with course requirements. In this process, students are constantly constructing new meanings and constructing new knowledge bases. By trying to understand

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

The study

My research involved working with four women students with whom I had a fair amount of contact in various contexts throughout 1995. The students share many similarities with other adult learners in South Africa's disrupted or poor schooling, impoverished backgrounds and broken families. Two are ex-SECED students and two ex-CETD. In their own ways, however, they are all strikingly different. Two are working mothers, one English-speaking, one English-speaking, one English-speaking, one African. Their ages range from early 30's to 60's with one foot in the future (as the eldest showed 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-cultural universe', I developed an approach that allowed me to incorporate culture and context as ways of understanding learning (see Thesen 1994, Thesen 1994). I conducted six interviews with all four students - one which foregrounded their experiences as students in the class, while the other foregrounded their lives outside the class as adults, as practitioners and as learners. During the first interview, I focused my questions on the two aims of our course and specifically their experiences of writing 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 specific of each student's personal experience. At the time I began this brief biographical sketch for each, I then discuss each of their experiences of learning and writing on the certificate course. Given that I am interested in the different ways in which students construct roles and learning and how this shapes their perceptions and experiences of writing, my analysis will focus more on understanding writing than on their actual writing practices.

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

Yasmine, aged 37, is a single (widowed) parent of two children who lives in Mitchell's Plain (formally 'a council housing area') with her single 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 Malmberget during the height of the Garooy Area forced removal. When I asked her about the effect of political events in her life, she said that while she was not directly involved in political activities, she was made aware of them through her experience and her family. After leaving school at the end of second grade, getting married and having a child, Yasmine started working in a clothing factory as a machine operator. Nine years later she had her second child and decided she was not going back. I asked her if this was because she wanted to get involved with helping people:

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

At the time of the interview she was employed at a youth volunteer centre as a satellite branch 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.

This was true of many students in Yasmine's learning experiences was that of conflict (Kawson 1990) — she also adopted it in many ways a challenge approach to her learning (Lee 1998). However, there was evidence of withdrawal and accommodation (Kawson 1990) or reformulation (Lee 1998) in her accounts. Given strong linkages between her personal and learner identity, Yasmine's experience demonstrated a fairly high sense of anxiety and conflict.

I wanted to give up at some stage.

Students who find learning sites of conflict, often experience life difficulties and, according to Kawson (1990:11), 'they are unique in the intensity and breadth of their personal life difficulties'. In terms of the kind of learner role she saw for herself, Yasmine felt that she was:

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

This seemed to be a case of the "ecloner" pattern of engagement Kawson argues is indicative of the withdrawal pattern. This was clearly evident in her relations with other students, with the lectures and with her processes of writing. While the role of lecturer was important in her learning, she felt that:

there'll always be this powerful thing: Yasmine spoke of the conflict between herself and the 'professionals', other students on the course, whom she perceived as thinking they were superior to her because of their formal job status. It appeared that some students were "in the discourse" and she was "outside it". This relates to Therew's comments about the different ways in which discourses 'rip 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 role we play
The discourse that we follow
As if we didn't know.

There's groups that feel they've been there
Others feel they'll never get anywhere
It's clear to them, but what about the rest of us?
I'm lost!!

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

Tomorrow.

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

If I feel strong about something, I dream it. Then I just get up and write it down... I would like to write a book. Not just any book — my life story, because of interesting things that 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 — "predicts too much" but, she's not perfect — she often feels disappointed. This is both with herself and with her lecturers:

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

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

I nearly didn't write this assignment because it dealt with politics (it was concerned with the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a key piece of legislation aimed at addressing socio-economic development and reform). Her assignment however, was lucid, 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 challenge the ambivalence she expresses towards the topic initially. There is thus a third

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

While I have argued that withdrawal was also demonstrated by Yasmine in her account of her learning experience, particularly in her experience of accommodation, this did not mean she was unable to shape her experience.

Nor did she admit to feeling out of place:

You can't be that, you have to be there. You must be flexible.

This issue of 'flexibility' is important for Nomzi and something which she brings into her learning on the course. Nomzi currently works as a sewing trainer for a large non-governmental organisation. While she loves her job and working close to people is also very clear that by doing things for her community she should not create dependency.

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

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

think, do your own things.

While she enjoyed the diversity in the class, she often felt that group discussion were stimulating. This emphasis on group work, an important part of the course and strong feature of the discourse of much adult and experiential learning, was something that was contrary to her preferred learning experience.

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

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

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

According to Kawson (1990), the primary pattern of interaction is that of transformation, and this is the most integrated and yet complex pattern of engagement. Students engaging in this way are uniquely positioned to understand and critique the undergraduate learning process; they speak to a prominent, distinctive 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 Nomzi'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 the constantly made reference to the role that the course played in her own practice, as well as the role that her work of practice played in her learning. Nomzi also showed a high degree of critical reflection on herself as a learner and how learning related to work and life. As a student, she thus had clear expectations of herself. While she valued lecturers as mediators, she also saw herself and her life experience as important in guiding her learning.

The notion of 'self-reflection' was also present when Nomzi spoke of her assessed writing. She acknowledged that such writing was about argument and that:

you don't write something like a story.

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

However, it is also important for Nomzi in her writing to reflect on past experience and to express her opinions.

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may be an argument which you must reflect on from what you are reading. You are 'I agree with this but in other ways, I disagree'. You reflect again - as if you are talking to someone else. I then repeat it to myself until I can bear it - it must make sense to me before I can write it.

These feelings about the importance of reflecting on your own experience were brought into your writing of Assignment 4. Unlike the other three students, you chose the first of the two choices (4A), mainly because:

I wanted to see 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 refocus 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 use the university as having value and the usefulness of the curriculums and transmission process is seen in her indication of the importance of written assessment as ‘selling you right from wrong’.

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

I learnt to think deep and also to add to my experience about how this happened 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 last few years has given me experience of what has changed and what has not. This assignment will be based on community understanding [and] needs and what impact the RDP principles would have on the community.

For Nontsi, therefore, success on the certificate was made possible by a complex process of self-reflection and 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 outside world(s). She also showed flexibility in her learning so that where at times she might have felt on the margins of the course (for example, in group work), she was actively engaged in the process of border-crossing and meaning-making for herself as a learner (McMillan 1998).

This emerges particularly in her strong feelings about the need for critical reflection, as well as in her belief of the importance of argument in the process of writing assignments.

The practices of writing were experienced differently by the students. For Nontsi, on the whole, they seemed more positive experiences than for Yaminne. 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 Yaminne, this was through her writing, finding a way to deal with her personal feelings in ways which did not obstruct her learning on the course; for Nontsi, this was in being able to reflect critically on both her life and student experience, integrating both.

While this is a unique process for both learners, it is at the intersection of the individual and the social and through the construction of learner roles that meaning is made and success attained (McMillan 1997).

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

We need to be mindful of the ’signals’ that are given out through curricula and pedagogical practices, particularly through assessment tasks. These are the class that students use in their attempts to engage with otherwise unfamiliar academic literacy practices. Furthermore, if we wish to make ’challenge’ and not just ’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 departaments 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 to 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, you 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 different views, understandings and meanings that people bring to the RDP. You should interview a minimum of five people, and they should be as diverse as possible (in terms of culture, language, class background, occupation, gender, etc.).
Introduction

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

The role of academic literacies in professional education has not been addressed in the same detail as these broader issues. They are important, however, not simply because of the written nature of much 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 simulated written examinations. When these disciplines are taught within professional

courses which aim to develop professional competence, we must consider the relationship between the types of writing required and the aims and objectives of the course. The question for those teaching professional courses is how to ensure that students are asked in ways that will ensure that students learn to make the links between academic concepts and theories and professional practice.

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

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

Academic discourse, academic literacies and professional education

Linguistic approaches

As a whole, ‘academic discourse’ is problematic. It is widely used, but in differing ways by individual disciplines. Any discussion of students as writers must start, not with a discipline-based definition but with a linguistic one. Sociologists such as Stiles (1980) regard individual academic disciplines as discourse communities, each using language in particular ways. There are communities between them, however, so that it is also possible to talk of academic discourse as a general form of English. All academic communities use written communication a great deal. This is a result both of the tradition of academic publishing and because communities are very widespread geographically. The language of a discourse community consists not simply of technical language in the sense of individual words or jargon, but also consists of rules for using these in spoken and written forms. In this sense each academic discipline – for example, psychology or sociology – is an individual discourse community. However, academic disciplines also have certain linguistic patterns and forms which serve to identify pieces of writing as ‘academic’ regardless of the subject. Although some of these rules are breaking down, academic English is generally marked by an impersonal style created by the use of abstract nouns, passive verbs and a tendency to avoid the use of pronouns such as ‘I’ or ‘we’ which identify the writer. It is also common for sentences to have grammatically simple forms that are typically formal, often prefixed ‘transferred’ with large nouns or adjectives whose main function is to make meaning more precise. Sentences are frequently elaborated with subordinate clauses. This style is often the subject of discussion in literary and academic writing and is unlikely to be confined with vocational writing which may have students in particular, now may already be familiar because of their previous professional training and experience.

Accordingly, students are generally expected to learn these things linguistically: the language of the subject or subjects they are studying, the rules and conventions used by individual disciplines, and the more general features of academic writing which make it instantly recognisable. As apprentices, students learn the language of subjects they are studying as an integral part of learning its concepts and theories, but they also undergo more general socialization into the conventions of academic writing. They are frequently expected to learn the general conventions of student writing very quickly on the assumption that they have already begun this process at school. Many students on professional courses are aware of these academic expectations, and whether transition is welcomed on the curriculum or profession, and students are often reluctant to take on the academic language of the subject, but also as an indication that they realise the importance of academic writing in gaining access to the subject, as well as an indication that they realise the importance of academic writing in gaining access to the subject, as well as an indication that they realise the importance of academic writing in gaining access to the subject.
Students also need opportunities to practice using the new academic language. This occurs through informal use of the discourse in class and in written coursework. Mode of study is important here. Full-time students obviously have greater opportunities to practice new discourses but may be learning two or three different discourses simultaneously, depending on the nature of their programme of study. Part-time students generally study only one, or at most two, subjects at a time. For them, less pieces of writing are produced, so they have fewer opportunities to learn a 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 social sciences and language teaching are familiar with the practical implications of linguistic approaches to teaching more generally. A second group of academic disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, has been greatly influenced by a narrative model. In sociology, the 'life course' model (Giddens 1979) provides an example of the use of narrative structures to explore the personal and social contexts of academic literacy. Sociology also deals with the effects of historical, social and cultural forces on people's actions. This is reflected in the way in which sociology is taught and assessed. Sociology students are encouraged to think about the way in which the social world is constructed, and to see themselves as part of this construction. Sociology is therefore a discipline that is concerned with the social context of academic literacy.

Reflecting on personal experience

In developing a theory of professional education, the caring professions have been strongly influenced by student-centred models of education. Kolb (1984) learning cycle focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and provides the main educational framework in the Open University courses. It considers the development of practical knowledge and the development of practical competence. The basic premise of Kolb's work is that learning in action in which students carry out an action and then think about what they have done. This model is reflected in the reflective practice model developed by Schön (1983) and the reflective practitioner. This is concerned with problem-solving, self-awareness and the development of personal competences. Schön's theories are rooted in the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' and in the notion of 'reflective practice'. This model is concerned with the development of practical knowledge and the development of practical competence. Schön's theories are rooted in the concept of the 'reflective practitioner' and in the notion of 'reflective practice'. This model is concerned with the development of practical knowledge and the development of practical competence.

Omnipresent discourses

The omnipresent discourses are those that are used in everyday life and are taken for granted. These discourses include those related to everyday life, such as shopping, cooking, and cleaning. These discourses are taken for granted and are not considered to be part of academic literacy. However, these discourses are important in the development of academic literacy. The development of academic literacy is not just about learning to write and read, but also about understanding the discourses that are used in everyday life. These discourses are not just used in everyday life, but are also used in academic contexts. The development of academic literacy is about learning to use these discourses in a meaningful way, and to understand the implications of using these discourses in different contexts.
level. There was a lot of informal discussion among academics as to the links between traditional academic assessment and work-based learning. This was a feeling among academics that students with no previous experience of university study had already assignments on the School's existing courses because they had developed the ability to write 'academically', but it was difficult to ascertain what lecturers meant by this. Therefore, I decided to carry out a small survey among academics' views on university-level and the use of personal experience in the School's existing second-year courses. I was particularly interested in how these responsibilities for setting assignment topics and examinations regarded the development of academic writing and in relationship to the assessment strategy in a sustained practice-oriented course. The survey was carried out at the end of the 1993 academic year so that respondents were able to draw on the examinations and projects they had just marked when responding.

At the 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 6-12 hours a week over a 10-week teaching year, during which students' completed four written assignments. The assignments varied, but most courses asked for three essays and one longer piece of work (an examined essay or project) which provided an opportunity for students to undertake a small investigation related to their job, or alternatively to pursue a topic through library research. This longer piece varied between 2000 and 5000 words. There were also some comments about the need for clear assignments and detailed information about the criteria for marking. The latter was not, strictly speaking, an academic writing skill, but in a distance-learning course the only way students could indicate that they had 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 (a vehicle to organise course themes and issues, etc.)

... reflect on your own use and see it to illustrate a point of argument rather than just 'tell the page'.

The use of personal experience as an exemplar is actually quite a sophisticated process and I don’t think that often people can see that the personal experience cited in the course has already been very carefully summarized 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, the teaching had been 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 and professional 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 troubled in this. This respondent was particularly aware of the impact of distance/long-distance teaching methods on the development of academic literacy and the skills which are associated with 'graduatehood'.

### Issues raised in the survey

Although the questionnaire was brief and relatively unstructured, the results it produced were valuable for the common concerns that they revealed. The importance these academics gave to the development of skills in expressing academic argument reflects the centrality of written academic argument to teaching in the UK university sector. In social sciences (and arts and humanities), essay-writing 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 not consistently defined and structured by different disciplines, and that 'new' disciplines related to professions such as nursing also have informal traditions (Biver and Worsen 1982). In professional education the emphasis on traditional forms of academic writing is on the measures of performance in 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 another issue of dimension. The way we normally talk or write about personal experience is in narrative form. Students on professionally related courses need opportunities to practice linking narrative to argument. This operates at a number of levels, from organizing the idea to 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 develop forms which students find comfortable in using, such as reports and case studies and small investigative projects. These often enable students to draw on work experience for content and to write about this experience in narrative form initially, while at a later point, for example in a discipline, they have to analyze and synthesize this in academic terms.

The main concerns of the academics is summed up in the word 'argument'. The response point to a desire for students to improve practice and to a context where the assessment strategy is based on traditional academic examiners. In addition, it is important to consider the discipline, features of exams supported on 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 area 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. Too many students this means discussing concepts and issues, both inside class and informally. Academic discourse is learnt within a social and collective setting, involving both non-student and student-student interaction. The importance of spoken language in the development of writing by adult students is well documented at levels from basic education (Basham 1995b) and return to learning (Gardiner 1985) to language support for university students (Clark and Bailes 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. Tutorials are optional and the main form of communication between students and tutors is a highly sophisticated and written exchange of written materials, especially students' own writing and feedback on it. Because students lack informal discussion opportunities, they generally do not practice using ideas and concepts in spoken language before they have to write about them. In other words, written language has to fill the role of spoken and transform the way in which Mitchell and others argue to spoken language. While aspects of Open University teaching, such as the use of activities for increasing the interactive nature of study, does not replace the oral practice at using academic discourse which occurs in informal discussions. One teaching issue is therefore how written language is used to provide practice at using academic English and subject-specific discourse.

The challenge is no luck-based learning of this sort is building up a steady dialogue of reflection with sufficient feedback loops when there are only limited opportunities to use spoken language in the ways described by Mitchell and Saich. Because it cannot be assumed that all students will take advantage of the interactive nature of the text (there is evidence that many students skip activities) the only dialogue that is guaranteed is the one between student and tutor around the student's assessed written work. Reflective diaries are useful here because they help students refine their existing professional experience as they make the links between their practice and the theories, concepts and issues contained in the course, within a peer group of writers which will be assessed.

Text-based learning must also assume that students are, or will quickly become, confident users of written test. Students who enrol on health and social welfare courses for workplace reasons often feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in writing at the beginning of the course, especially if they have no background of university study. As the amount and type of importance of the text, they often feel under great pressure to become confident writers quickly, both in order to complete their written work and more generally because they may need to communicate with tutors and other students in writing. In a tutorial and learning setting, learning to write about personal experience, as opposed to drawing on it in spoken discussions, becomes a priority. Compared to writing, especially the use of anachronistic tautologies, makes similar demands.

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

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

Practical implications for professional courses

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

There is a need to develop systems for part-time and distance-learning courses which substitute for the kind of communication expected in a classroom so that students can begin to reframe their experience using academic discourse in a less formal way in an assessed assignment. This should begin by being more explicit about the positive value of studying part-time, particularly the opportunity it provides to reflect back the academic learning into professional practice on an almost daily basis. Computer conferencing, for example, has potential to serve as a practitioner by providing a 'protected' situation in which students communicate with each other and with the tutor, learning and practising the academic discourse. Through the setting of appropriate discussion topics it is possible to provide opportunities for students to relate these to practice in a very immediate way. (See Les, Chapter 4, for further discussion of the relationship between conferencing and learning.)

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

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

Conclusion

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

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comparing communication, observation, the performance of technical and scientific procedures and the exercise of professional judgement (Ernst 1994). The literature indicates that the two have many principles in common. In particular, there is a desire for students to acquire the discourse of the professional or academic community. The ability to communicate effectively within that community is seen as an indication of professional or academic success. But there are particular implications for the support of students who lack the opportunity to engage in written language in their studies.

11

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

Barry Sliyer

Every year, thousands of British schoolteachers begin work towards a master's degree in education, based in a UK university or college. Their studies typically require them to read research and scholarship about aspects of education, to carry out practical activities and research projects, and to prepare written assignments. Their reasons for embarking on such courses vary. They may wish to improve their job security or their chances of promotion, by adding to their existing qualifications. They may wish to improve their professional effectiveness and confidence, by gaining a greater understanding of certain aspects of their work as teachers. They may wish to learn about an aspect of education which is new to them, perhaps because they would like to work in that area in the future. They are highly motivated students. Most of them pay their own fees for what is, at least in part, a form of professional development. Most of them work towards their degrees in their own time: indeed, few are given time off from their teaching commitments in order to attend sessions or to make progress with their studies.

This chapter discusses the results of a research project that examined the kinds of writing schoolteachers are required to produce as part of their work within master's-level programmes in the field of education. The Master of Arts in Education programme at my own institution, the Open University (OUE), was used as the main case study for this project during the 1997 academic year. Based on an analysis of course materials, interviews with MA students and tutors, and an analysis of students' assignments and the written feedback they receive from their tutors,
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; Fitchurch 1989), which I would argue make up the MA programme — and indeed many MA programmes in education — attempt to incorporate. The first of these places particular value on the traditional intellectual competences of the 'academic', at least in the humanities and social sciences: the construction of a coherent argument, appropriate use of evidence, critical analysis and the expression of your own ideas.

The latter places particular value on aspects of professional development typically associated with training: the ability to reflect upon one's practice, and upon the implications of that reflection for changing practice and the ability to demonstrate the professional relevance of one's learning, and the need to link the results of study to professional competences and practical outcomes. Whether, and how, these competing discourses can ultimately be reconciled within a single programme of study was one of the main issues in the research.

A key assumption underpinning the research was that it is within the 'literacy practices' associated with these courses — and especially in the writing requirements — that these two orders of discourse are most acutely fought.

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

One of the starting points for the research was the observation that many teachers studying within the MA programme experienced considerable confusion concerning the expectations they were attempting to meet, with respect to writing, sometimes leading to fraught conflicts with their tutors. These experiences reinforced the view that the Open University course materials are generally considered to be exceptional in the extent to which they make such expectations explicit. I suspected that this confusion was in part a reflection 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 discursive 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, emerging from research into the nature of professional training and knowledge, to the specific context of writing — an aspect that tends to be overlooked in such research.

With respect to the field of academic literacy, the project is located within, and seeks to make a contribution to, a growing area of research into aspects of academic writing in higher education based on a 'critical' perspective on discourse and literacy practices, or what Lea and Street (Chapter 2 of this volume) call an 'academic literacies' model. Within this perspective, academic writing is conceptualized as a set of social practices embedded in networks of culture and power, rather than viewing academic writing as a transparent medium for representing knowledge, or as a set of rules to which students need to accommodate, this perspective views academic institutions as sites of power, and academic writing as a site where power is exercised and contested. This perspective problematizes these practices, and recognizes that students' so-called failures in academic writing may be explained by, for example, their struggle to reconcile their own identities, and purposes for writing, with the authority and control of the institution (Bazin 1998). Such a perspective has provided a helpful explanatory framework for research into the academic writing carried out by schoolteachers within master's-level courses in education, for reasons which will be discussed at the end of this chapter. For a more detailed elaboration of this perspective on academic literacy, please refer to the editors' introduction to this volume.

Another field of research and scholarship is pertinent to this investigation, and is that of the area of 'professional knowledge', or 'expert knowledge' — and teachers' professional knowledge in particular. One of the key elements of this knowledge is the way that teachers organize their teaching within the classroom (see for example, Schles 1983, 1987; Boll 1984; and Ernst 1994). It is from this body of work that such widely used terms as 'reflective practice' and 'professional development' have been drawn. The contributions to this volume examine the ways in which professional knowledge is encoded in language (Gunnarsson et al. 1997), but apparently none has examined the rules of written language which have been associated with professional training. My starting point is that is in the language practices,
twice during their studies – it is hardly surprising that some students find it difficult to build up a sense of confidence and progression in their ability to write academically as they move from one assignment to the text, and from one module to the next.

Text analysis of individual assignment specifications

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

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

Explicit explanations of the conventions the student is expected to use

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

Assignments 01, 02 and 05 are conventional essay questions.

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

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

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

Write impersonally as far as possible avoid first person pronouns.

The Adult Learning team adopts a contrasting position:

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

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

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

It is important to understand that the ES88 assignments are reports on management rather than academic essays. We have found from past experience that some students do not achieve at high a grade as they might have, had they appreciated the difference 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 truncating 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-reliance on quotations and the use of academic jargon, and that students will have been helped to understand what is expected of them by being told what is not expected of them. This point notwithstanding, the passage is significant for the purposes of this analysis, in the sense that it represents the only attempt in any of the 18 assignment booklets to recognize explicitly the fact that students may be approaching the course with a set of assumptions about academic writing that differs from the expectations for ES88, based on their previous experience of study, and to point out some of the differences between management reports and academic essays.

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

Of interest here was evidence of course teams' expectations of the ways in which students should and should not draw upon their own professional
experience when answering the question or completing the task assigned. This is not only a capacity indicative of how students should or should not identify the implications of their argument or analysis for their own professional work. Analysing instances of this feature was seen as one way of examining the way in which professional and academic traditions are played through in 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.

An analysis of this feature of assignment questions revealed wide variations between modules (and to some extent within modules) in the way students are expected to represent their professional work when setting assignments. In some modules (notably 'Education, Training, and Employment', 'Child Development', 'Language and Literature', and 'Gender Issues in Education') students are expected to keep to a minimum any discussion of professional circumstances, or if of the professional development achieved as a result of study — though no advice is given on how to construct this linguistically.

The examples of essay-style questions given in Table 11.5 provide an indication of the way students' professional work is referred to (if at all) in these modules. There is clearly no expectation underlying these assignments that students are expected to or, even if they are, to draw upon their professional experience as teachers in order to attempt, and succeed at, the writing task. Indeed, for most students in this category there is an implication that students would be penalised if they include more than a passing reference to their professional work when constructing their assignments.

In steps 1-4 you are asked to provide a critical review of the mentoring programme you have been involved in from the perspective of the institution, the mentors, or mentees and your own professional development. In step 5 you are asked to examine the concept of the 'mentoring school' and explain the potential for mentoring in other staff development processes within your institution.

More is required to locate any discussion within the wider educational debates on mentoring by referring to the research and literature in the field, such as are indicated in the Study Guide. In addition, you are encouraged to present evidence from your own2 mentoring experience in support of your conclusions.

leaving students understandably uncertain about their personal position in relation to issues in the course. A further assumption was that assignments which demanded detachment were located in a more 'academic' tradition, and the assignments which demanded involvement were located in a more 'professional' tradition. For instance, the 1990-1995 exam for describing and analysing discourse was used in order to identify key features which encoded these ideas, such as decontextualizing (that is, using noun forms rather than more active verb forms, distancing objectification and detachment), modality (that is, the degree of tentativeness or certainty expressed in appropriate verb forms, active voice, or explicit agency) and agency (that is, how clearly the person being referred to is identified).

Here, too, there were wide variations between modules (and to some extent within modules) in the way students are expected to position themselves with respect to ideas in the course. Perhaps predictably, there was a close correspondence between the way modules divide in the 'academic'—professional' distinction above, and the way they divide in the 'detachment—involvement' distinction here. The same modules identified in the preceding section, which expected students to keep a minimum any discussion of professional development achieved as a result of study, showed significantly more usage of decontextualization, passive voice, indirect address to the student (this is no longer a direct indicator of agency) and (possibly superimposed) tentative forms of modality ('perhaps', 'noggin'). Moreover, the modules situated in the preceding section, which expected students to make visible the professional knowledge they have achieved through their study of the course, used fewer decontextualizations, more active voice, more explicit agency in the way the student is addressed ('you', 'your') and more assertive forms of modality ('you should'). (Please refer to the examples provided in the preceding section for illustrations of these points.) Although this result may suggest that the two categories of analysis could be conflated in future analyses, it is nevertheless noteworthy that there should be a close correspondence between the way course teams refer to students' professional work and the way students are positioned, within specifications for written assignments, with respect to ideas in the course.

Use of examples
Of interest here was the way instructions were expressed by course teams - these being indications of the way in which the assignment task is perceived. At issue here was whether assignment booklets made use of imperative forms (they did) or declarative forms (they did not), but the specific kinds of imperatives adopted. Table 11.4 gives a selection from the some 50 different imperative forms found in the 19 assignment booklets. These kinds of instructions will typically appear either within the main rubric of the assignment question, or within paragraphed sections accompanying the question. No pattern could be found in the way these imperatives were distributed across the modules, although there was more clearly 'professional' modules showed a slight tendency to use a wider range of imperatives than the 'academic'

<table>
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<th>Table 11.4</th>
<th>A selection of imperatives taken from assignment specifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Justify Write a report</td>
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<td>Critically evaluate</td>
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<td>Critically examine</td>
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<td>Critically discuss</td>
<td>Provide a report when you apply your knowledge to a specific issue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflect on</td>
<td>Report what happens</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graciously reflect upon</td>
<td>Outline</td>
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</table>

modules. All modules were very similar, however, in their reductiveness to define these imperatives. With one or two exceptions, the course teams' ideas on how to go about following such instructions is not made explicit, yet these imperatives represent key indicators of the 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 teams approach the task of preparing assignments, as well as the complicity of the codes which are used to teach in order to complete their assignments successfully. How, for example, should students understand the difference between 'critically evaluate', 'critically examine', 'critically discuss' and 'critically appraise' — and, indeed, between 'evaluate' and 'critically evaluate'? It is possible that, for some academic teams, the terms are 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 awareness of students and tutors, and the analysis of students' written assignments and the written feedback received from their tutors. These will be reported in the future. Nevertheless, the following discussion, of issues arising from the foregoing analysis of the assignment booklets for the modules in the OU's MA programme, is informative to some extent by promulgating findings from these other research strands. The analysis of the assignment booklets 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 epistemology. There is clearly no consistency across the programme about the professional knowledge that
teachers are expected to demonstrate by means of these highly refined writing forms. The renaissance of course teams to make explicit the kinds of professional knowledge they aim to promote through written assignments suggests that these teams have either not given adequate consideration to this requirement: one that they must not neglect, if they are to make their aims visible to students. Many of the privileged genres of writing in the programme have, in the most part been imposed—possibly without conscious deliberation—from traditional academic disciplines such as sociology and psychology, and may therefore not be appropriate for promoting the professional knowledge that is (implicitly) saturate within these courses. These findings are illuminated by data from the interviews with academics—most of whom placed paramount importance upon the practical and professional dimensions of their MA studies, rather than upon their ability to engage with academic debates or to handle theoretical concepts persuasively in their writing. In this sense, the predominance of impermanent and traditional academic writing genres within a number of modules aligns in part for their sense of uncertainty and frustration—it is that since the relevance of such genres in relation to their professional aspirations is so narrowly articulated within course materials.

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

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

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

Teachers have already gone through a process of induction into a new community of discourse since before the recent MA courses. That is the professional culture with which they identify, and it is from the perspective of that culture that they study for an MA. They do not embark on their MA studies as the first step in a career change from professional teachers to professional academics, and yet many of the literacy practices in these programmes are predicated on an assumption that they are doing just that.

In this sense, the academic-professional divide is inappropriately: both orders of discourse are prevalent. The issue, therefore, is one of two professional cultures clashing: the professional culture of schoolteaching and the (high-class) academic professional culture of the academy. Whereas schoolteachers embark on their studies in order to enhance their effectiveness and/or status within the professional culture of schoolteaching, the discursive practices of the academy position them as novice academics. Part of the explanation for this fact lies in the way that institutions of higher education use language to sanctify and legitimate the professional field of schoolteaching, as an ideology which positions students of any type as relatively powerless (Booth, 1991). The project of validating the knowledge that is at the heart of their studies, and indeed the discourse and knowledge that schoolteachers manage to construct for themselves as professionals as a result of their studies, are only sanctioned by the institution when they can be seen to be meaningfully realized in the language of the novice academic.

I would speculate that the literacy practices that have grown up around the study of education originated in contexts where people studying education at postgraduate level were negotiating a transition between one culture (schoolteaching) and another (academic research and scholarship). These traditions of academic practice have persisted, despite the fundamental changes that have taken place in the professional and personal circumstances within which most people work towards master's degrees in education. It appears to be the case that many of the literacy 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 mining the community to consider a pivot the kinds of knowledge which could and should be saturate within such programmes, and to develop forms of writing which facilitate the acquisition of such knowledge. Indeed, it might be that conventional academic genres of writing serve to constrain teachers' ability to construct professional knowledge for themselves.

Implications for theory

Although the analysis is still at an early stage, the project has already begun to demonstrate, among other things, a 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 contributed to a 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 conform MA students in the course of their studies, and the variety of ways students are expected to demonstrate knowledge, are implicit in the project of developing professional knowledge, demonstrate that this is a fruitful explanatory framework for research of this kind.

Implications for practice

At this stage of the research, two main implications for practice are suggested by the analysis. The first is the need for a more explicit and systematic approach for helping students to identify and to critique the kinds of expectations they are expected to fulfill in relation to written assignments. The analysis of specifications for written assignments in this chapter demonstrates the need for some overarching framework and language to help students to identify the kinds of writing expected of them within MA modules. An adaptation of Fairclough's (1989) approach to critical theory might provide students with the tools to understand the assumptions underlying written assignments, and to gain a greater understanding of the subject positions such specifications create for them. Evidence from the interviews with students reinforced this finding: some of the students interview

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appeared to have a 'metalinguistic' 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 with them to their study of these courses the particular forms of cultural capital that Fairclough and Wodak (1997) identify as enabling other students quickly to identify the discursive ground rules operating within their courses and to produce forms of writing which satisfy those ground rules. Nevertheless, it is an emerging with which all students on such programmes could productively engage.

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