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Journal Item

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A growing body of academic literacies research has enhanced our understanding of university writing as contested, institutionally situated practice with important consequences, particularly for students as they learn to negotiate the writing demands of university study. Less empirical attention has been paid to the practices of subject academics as they guide, set, and assess student writing. This paper is based on an ethnographically-oriented study of fourteen UK university teachers in diverse institutional and disciplinary contexts. Data presented illustrate the ways in which competing discourses of writing as 'skills' and as 'learning' are played out in individuals' practices, in their institutional contexts. Analysis shows how a dominant discourse of writing as 'skills' becomes associated with particular ideas about the value of writing work, how and by whom it should be done, and points to consequences for students, teachers and for the role of academic writing in teaching and learning at university.

Key words: academic literacies, academic labour, student writing, discourse, higher education pedagogy

Introduction

There is a growing awareness amongst higher education researchers of the centrality of language to the workings of both policy and practice at university (Bloxham and West 2007; Mann 2008; Turner 2011a). A number of authors have enhanced our understanding of learning at university through a recognition that language is key to all disciplines, not only in the form of texts, but also in teaching and assessment practice (Turner 2011a, 4). Language provides an important lens through which to investigate not only explicitly language-related pedagogies (located, for example, in writing and language support centres), but the wider pedagogic practices of higher education itself. This core understanding has been brought to bear in relation to established practices such as the lecture (Thesen 2006) and traditional essay (Lillis 2001; English 2011), as well as to newer 'hybrid' forms of text production associated with professional higher education (e.g. Lillis and Rai 2011; Stierer 2008). A number of researchers have also focused on rapidly evolving digital and multimodal textual practices amongst staff and students (Lea and Jones 2011; Goodfellow and Lea 2013). Research undertaken in

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the 1990s by Lea and Street (1998) provided an important foundation for this work, proposing a view of university writing as 'academic literacies', that is, as contested, institutionally situated practices with important consequences for participants. Their study incorporated teachers' perspectives; however, subsequent academic writing research has focused mainly on students. Recently, empirical interest has emerged in the practices of those who *work with* student writers, such as proof readers (Harwood, Austin and Macaulay 2012; Turner 2011b) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners (Turner 2004, 2011a). A longer-established literature in the US examines the experiences of writing instructors working within university Composition (e.g. Schell 1998; Holbrook 1991). A common theme emerging from these diverse research domains is the perceived marginal positioning and invisibility of 'language work' (Turner 2011a; Crowley 2002; Horner 2007) and the low value placed on it in many institutional contexts. Perhaps partly as a consequence of such invisibility, the perspectives and practices of *university teachers themselves* as they discuss, guide, set, respond to and assess student writing in their disciplines, have rarely been empirically central (with some recent exceptions exploring teachers' views of assessment, e.g. Bailey and Garner 2010; Burns 2013). The present study builds on the tutor-focused element of Lea and Street's pioneering research. Based on an ethnographic exploration of academic teachers' practices and perspectives around student writing, this paper throws light on the positioning of 'language work' for academics teaching in the disciplines in UK Higher Education.

A number of authors in recent years (e.g. Haggis 2003, 2009; Mann 2008; Clegg et al. 2004) have challenged researchers to develop an understanding of HE pedagogy which does not isolate it from the broader social, cultural, political and economic structures of the sector. In adopting an academic literacies approach, the study presented here responds to this call, seeking to open up pedagogy around student writing as social practice, entangled with questions of identity, epistemology and social relations. Methodologically, this entails a focus on the lived experience of teachers as well as learners, understood through an analysis of multiple sources of data, not only texts. The specific approach of this paper is to trace university discourses of writing across these multiple sources,

through an exploration of individual academic teacher[3] case studies and of themes emerging from across the data. In this context, discourse refers to language in use, whether spoken or written, understood as pointing to particular ways of knowing and being in the world, indexing particular world views, values and ideologies (Gee, 1996; Blommaert, 2005). This notion is productive here because it offers a theoretical connection between the language of everyday, situated engagement with others and the world and the broader social contexts which shape/are shaped by such interactions. Discourse therefore provides a conceptual basis from which to connect the words and practices of individuals with the institutional contexts of higher education in which they are enacted, and with real social and material consequences.

Data presented in this paper illustrate the detailed ways in which multiple discourses of writing are played out in the practices of individual academics teaching in a range of disciplines. I show how academic teachers' understandings of writing become associated with particular orientations to writing work – ideas about where such work should be located institutionally, how and by whom it should be done - and explore different ways in which the dominance of some discourses over others is enacted in everyday practices. I then point to some of the consequences for students, teachers and for the role of academic writing in teaching and learning at university, concluding with some implications for practice and research.

The relationship between discourse and pedagogic practice around student writing

While the emphasis varies, most attempts to define the connection between discourse and practice frame them as intimately, dynamically related. Smith's concern with the role of discourse in institutional practice is pertinent in the context of university literacies: she frames discourses as co-

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[3] Participants in the study occupied a range of institutional roles, and included part time staff and postgraduate students involved in disciplinary teaching: they used a variety of terms to identify themselves professionally (tutor, academic, lecturer, teacher etc.). Here, the term "academic teacher" is used to encompass this range.

ordinating the situated activities of individuals 'as how what they do is made accountable to themselves and others' (2002, 41). Looking specifically at educational settings, Ivanič traces in detail the relationship between particular understandings of writing and parallel notions of what it means to learn to write, arguing that the actions people take 'as learners, teachers and assessors are instantiations of discourses of writing and learning to write' (2004, 220). A number of studies of university writing have explored links between identifiable discourses of writing and particular pedagogic practices (e.g. Creme 2000; Lillis 2006). Lea and Street (1999, 62) looked specifically at 'the underlying and implicit theoretical frames about writing' which informed the practices of academic staff in their 1990s study. They showed how tutor interviews and advice texts articulated various understandings of required writing which often conflicted with one another or with tutors' pedagogic intentions, potentially leading to student confusion. While the notion of a discrete, coherent discourse is to some extent a construct of convenience (Bizzell 2002), these studies show it can be helpful to identify and name particular sets of assumptions and beliefs which seem to cluster together and to have significance in the work of individuals. Moreover, at any juncture, some discourses are more privileged and powerful than others, more likely to be implied in institutional routines or in ideological 'common sense' (Fairclough 2001, 64ff). As Turner argues, some discourses of language are more 'readily available' (2011a, 4) than others in particular contexts. The data presented below go some way towards illustrating how, while discourses mingle in the practices of individuals in institutional contexts, some emerge dominant from the mix.

Contrasting discourses of student writing: 'skills' or 'learning'?

Academic literacies researchers have identified one particularly problematic discourse of academic writing in circulation, that of writing as 'skills'. Lea and Street trace associations between 'writing as decontextualized skills' (1998, 159) and technicist pedagogies which treat writing as a discrete set of competencies, unproblematically transferable to new contexts. They call this the 'autonomous' model of writing (Street 1984), arguing that it dominates the UK academy, and trace its difficult

consequences for students, for example where university tutors neglect to communicate tacit, context-specific expectations, leading to disappointment in assessment. Lea and Street and others (e.g. Haggis 2003; Turner 2011a) have also made a link between a 'skills' discourse and 'deficit' perceptions of student writers, pointing out an association between writing as 'skills' and language provision located in extra-disciplinary 'remedial' and 'support' spaces. These deficit-based associations are not limited to students, but have a tendency to 'rub off' on those who carry out such language work (Turner 2011a; Chanock 2007; Blythman and Orr 2006). Turner (2011a) links autonomous skills discourses of writing with a 'conduit' language ideology, in which words merely transmit content, rather than constitute meaning, a perspective which views language as ideally invisible. She argues that this view conceptually separates knowledge from the language practices of the discipline and that as a consequence these practices assume the character of a set of somewhat arbitrary rules and vaguely articulated rhetorical values such as 'brevity' and 'clarity'. This is in sharp contrast to a view of language as centrally concerned with ways of knowing and building knowledge in particular academic fields, and hence with students' own meaning-making and learning in these fields. This paper will focus on these two contrasting clusters of discourse emerging in data from the study: writing as 'skills', and writing as 'learning'.

The study

This paper is based on a study of the practices of fourteen academic teachers working in a range of university contexts, including Oxbridge, Russell Group, Post-1992, New and Distance Learning settings[4]. Participants were working in a variety of disciplinary roles, teaching undergraduates in subjects ranging from Computer Science to History. The approach was ethnographically oriented, drawing on multiple data sources over a two-year period in order to build detailed case studies of

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[4] These terms were used to characterise institutions of different types across the study, selected in order to incorporate likely variation in the UK HE sector more broadly: below, participants' institutional affiliations are indicated using these categories. The Russell Group is a small group of elite, prestigious institutions. "Post-1992" refers to institutions which became universities following the 1992 Higher and Further Education Act. "New" refers to former higher education colleges inaugurated as universities in the last fifteen years.

individuals' practices, with a focus on participants' lived experiences (Table 1). Data yielded insights into participants' activities surrounding students' writing and how they made sense of such work. Different discourses or 'clusters' of discourse were identified through 'vertical analysis' (the building of case studies of individual participants' practices) and 'horizontally' to identify patterns across the study as a whole (Barton and Hamilton 1998). These complementary approaches correspond to the next two sections of this paper respectively. All data were interrogated carefully in order to identify wordings, actions and topics which seemed to index (Lillis 2008) particular discourses of writing or writing work. This involved looking carefully at the specific meanings and uses of these wordings in context, including acknowledgement of the reflective role played by the researcher in generation of data.

Table 1. List of data sources.

Data source	Description
Initial semi-structured interviews	Explored aspects of undergraduate teaching role engaging with students as writers, in institutional context.
Follow-up, text-oriented interviews	Participants talked through specific texts in detail. See Lillis' 'talk around text' (2008) and Lea and Stierer (2009).
Gathered texts	Writing advice and guidance, assessment documents, web pages, marked assignments, feedback sheets, email and forum messages, module evaluations, moderation paperwork.
Audio recordings and observation notes	Collected on research visits to taught classes, small group and 1-1 sessions.
Field notes	Researcher's field diary, recording informal conversations, notes on physical environment and some photographs.
Participants' audio recordings	Recorded while marking student assignments (three participants).

Hybrid discourses and practices around student writing

In this section I explore ways in which different discourses of writing co-exist and compete in the writing work of individual academic teachers. I draw on three individual illustrative case studies: Martin, based in a Russell Group medical school ; Paul, a Senior Lecturer in Sports Science at a New University; and Sue, a tutor in Science for a Distance Learning institution.

Co-existing discourses of writing

Martin is a clinical consultant teaching on an interdisciplinary degree at Russell Group University, involving modules in medical and sociological subjects. In his context, we see the co-existence of two contradictory discourses of writing. Students attend a series of 'study skills' classes including a discrete 'how to write session'. These classes are run by a colleague (a lecturer with a nursing background). Although he is course director, Martin claims not to know what happens in this session. Yet, elsewhere in the same interview, Martin talks about academic writing practices as integral to the course. Students on his specialist module do a piece of writing around their own mini-research question, which they have designed with Martin's support. He explains that

> the purpose of our writing is to start getting them used to the processes and the transferable skills they would need if they were going to be an academic health researcher, which is entirely question-driven … I think to be a reflective and … critical clinician you're perpetually asking questions and your ability to frame a question, [and] know where the evidence is to answer that question, is somewhere pretty close to the core of what one does.

In context, Martin's use of the term 'transferable skills' alongside the phrase 'getting them used to the processes' suggests something closer to a disciplinary apprenticeship than a sense of writing as a set of generic skills such as might be acquired in a 'how to write' session. Students have to come up with their own question because Martin sees this as intrinsic to a medical way of thinking and to clinical practice itself. This suggests an epistemological role for writing: through their writing, students are learning to pose and answer questions in medicine and as practising doctors.

In Martin's context, then, writing is sometimes treated as a discrete skill which can be dealt with in a separate one-off session, the content of which Martin feels no need to know. On the other hand, it is understood as 'close to the core' of disciplinary practice, firmly within his remit as an academic teacher. These conflicting discourses and practices are able to co-exist partly because of the division

of labour within the course team between subject modules and the "study skills" sessions. Divisions of identity also seem to play a role, for example between the practising 'clinician' and the nursing lecturer he frames as an 'educationalist'. During interview, Martin positions himself as being somewhat in the opposite camp to this colleague where student writing is concerned. For example, he comments on an 'interesting tension' between his own preferred practices and those of this colleague. He recounts a disagreement over whether lecturers should be able to make written comments directly on students' scripts, and also describes his resistance to a feedback 'template' she has produced for the course team. Martin appears to prefer a culture of academic autonomy. For example, while he comments wryly on the assignment-setting practices of colleagues (which differ markedly from his own), even as course director he does not venture to raise this, simply reflecting inwardly: 'ah, that's how they do it, then'. He appears to assume that these different approaches are not up for discussion with these colleagues, but simply a question of an 'interesting…contrast in styles', thus sustaining mixed, and possibly contradictory, messages for students about the role of writing in this degree.

Struggling to get past writing as a barrier

Paul is an early career academic who has recently moved from industry to take up a co-ordinating role in Sports Development at New University. Powerful autonomous discourses of writing seem to divert Paul's energies away from approaching writing as a site of disciplinary teaching and learning. A field note records a chat with Paul and a colleague where they talk about other, 'research-focused' staff at their university 'who … regarded students as a nuisance and acted as though they worked at [local Russell Group institution]'. Political aspects of his institution's sector positioning (as a teaching-led, less prestigious university focusing on vocational degrees) thus provide a dynamic context for Paul's understanding of student writing. He feels strongly that both reading and writing currently form a 'barrier' to students' learning: this view justifies time spent in a context where Paul feels activity focused on student writing must be defended to colleagues who think differently (such as those Russell-Group oriented staff described above). On the other hand, it also suggests a separation of writing as 'skills' from the learning of 'content'. Paul comments: 'if you have to remove some content

to make sure those skills are there, then do that, because … without them the chances are you'll never get to the content'.

In the study, Paul also frequently articulates issues of academic writing in terms of surface features, such as spelling, and of student 'problems' with academic conventions, particularly referencing. His orientation to student writing is informed by discourses of writing as a lower-level study skill ('secondary school stuff') and as deficit. Paul also views academic writing conventions as a source of risk for students, conceived of negatively as something which can go very wrong almost without warning, resulting for example in being caught (accidentally) cheating: as Paul puts it: 'perhaps above anything, above all else, bad referencing will get them in trouble'. His preoccupation with this aspect of academic writing is apparently strengthened by the priority given in his institution to issues such as plagiarism for which, students are told in official guidance, 'Penalties will be severe' (See Thesen and Cooper, 2014 for a discussion of such negative framings of risk in academic writing). Anxiety about the risks of writing may be exacerbated by Paul's apparent lack of confidence in his own writing expertise, articulated throughout two interviews. For example, while discussing a student's script in detail, he comments:

> I'm always a little bit conscious [of] the comments or the observations I'm making about
> structure, hopefully reasonably well on spelling, slightly less so but still hopefully with a fair
> chance on grammar… **there are times when I think oh I don't know myself … which side of
> the s is the apostrophe supposed to go** [laughs][researcher's emphasis]

Academic writing conventions are thus reified and feared, rather than seen as integral to the making, owning and validation of knowledge in the discipline. While Paul identifies as a committed teacher, not too 'highbrow' to engage in student writing development, and devoting considerable time to it, writing is frequently not embedded conceptually as an integral part of his disciplinary learning and teaching.

Even where Paul's work with student writers appears to occur while he is engaged in teaching disciplinary content, its writing-related nature appears to be somewhat hidden from view, even from Paul himself. For example, at interview, it is only when Paul is actively prompted to describe his practices involving more advanced students does it occur to him that there is still quite a lot of writing-related work involved. For example, he describes detailed iterative discussions about second year practical projects:

> **when I think about it, to be honest …I don't tend to consciously think about this** but …they're actually getting feedback …quite intense and quite often on all aspects really, the quality of the content, the amount of background reading and academic material they've included and referenced, but also their writing style and the clarity of their writing, their referencing … that might happen a dozen times before they hand in their final report… [researcher's emphasis]

Despite the continued preoccupation with referencing, this extract does offer a brief glimpse of ongoing teacher/student engagement around writing as disciplinary learning. However, until prompted to reflect on this practice in an interview, the role of student writing here appears to be sidelined for Paul. Writing work is invisible unless it is conceived of as addressing a problem, separate from disciplinary-specific conversations.

Epistemological responses buried under deficit perceptions

Sue's case study furnishes a further example of different discourses of writing being played out in the varied pedagogical practices of individual academic teachers which reflect this discoursal mix. When Sue (Distance Learning University) talked about sample marked assignments in interviews, she appeared to draw consistently on a 'transparent' model of writing, focusing frequently on 'errors'; she also often framed student writing in terms of individual deficits, both intellectual and moral. For example, she refers to some students' writing skills as 'non-existent' and in other cases to poor writing being the result of 'laziness' and frequently refers to student plagiarism. Her perspective was thus dominated by a view of writing as a technical skill in conforming to conventions. However, combining interviews with textual and audio data enable a richer, more variegated picture to emerge.

Sue, a geologist, is marking a level one assignment which instructs students to examine several rock samples and say how they are formed. While marking one script, she comments that the student is 'mixing sentences up'. When this is interpreted alongside the text itself, it becomes clear that Sue means that the student is first writing how the rock type has been formed, then describing the appearance of the samples using text book wordings; Sue, on the other hand, had been hoping for the argument to unfold in a different way, with the student's own observations first, followed by comments on how the rock had been formed based on these empirical findings. She remarks on the audio recording 'that's not learning, I'd say'. Sue's written comment on another student's assignment records a similar instance:

Specimen 5 forms by rapid cooling at the Earth's surface, with holes present...it doesn't contain any quartz, only tiny crystals, and is dark in colour; usually black [**but as not visible even with a hand lens how do you know this from your specimen? Crystalline texture (specimen twinkles under light)…**]
[**Sue's commentary in square brackets**]

In these and similar moments, which surfaced from time to time in a range of different data sources, Sue seems to be engaging with writing as knowledge-building and as disciplinary learning. She appears less concerned with surface features of language or correct use of conventions than with the importance of moving from observations to conclusions rather than the other way round, of learning how to reason like a scientist, and how to 'do' science in a written assignment rather than just report on established knowledge.

To some extent, these brief glimpses of a more epistemological engagement on Sue's part are buried under other, more autonomous discourses of writing she draws on. Judging from her extensive feedback on a range of sample assignments, although she does sometimes point students towards a scientific approach to knowledge in their writing, Sue spends considerably more time engaging with what she calls 'poor writing skills'. For example, she highlights errors; makes changes to students' sentences and paragraphs to improve the 'written expression' at the level of grammar, vocabulary or

formatting; composes and types her own exemplar text into student's text; or cuts and paste sample wordings from other sources. The overwhelming impression emerging in interviews is that Sue experiences this work as a time-consuming distraction from what she believes is her core task: helping students 'understand the science'. Her perception of student writing as a problem which she shouldn't have to sort out appears to be exacerbated by her own experience of the demanding and time-consuming nature of work at the 'textface' (Tuck 2013). Sue directly links this negative experience of student writing with what she perceives as a frequent lack of preparedness for study at university level: 'they can't write at all and then suddenly I'm a foundation tutor on a level two course and there's only so many hours … you can devote to one student.' This raises the question of whether Sue's active epistemological understanding of writing as science – captured in marginal comments such as the one above and in observed teaching sessions - might be de-emphasised in her practice as she negotiates the lived realities of long hours spent reading and responding to student writing at the surface level. The notion that writing is part of learning science may be drowned out for her, and so for her students, by other, louder messages about their writing as a burdensome obstacle to teaching and learning in the discipline.

These three vignettes illustrate the way in which contrasting discourses of writing, as skills and as disciplinary knowledge-making, emerged in the words and practices of individual academic teachers, articulated by participants in different ways. They show how some discourses were more 'readily available' than others (Turner, 2011), and how autonomous understandings of writing were able to persist and flourish in particular institutional contexts. Across the study, as in the above cases, the role of student writing was often understood by study participants as a generic technical skill, with the focus on correct manipulation of conventions. Student writing was seen as having little to do with disciplinary knowledge-building, hence writing work as having little to do with disciplinary teaching. Occasionally, spaces for writing as disciplinary learning seemed to open up: however, writing itself was often invisible in these spaces (as in Paul's case), or they were overwhelmed by discourses and practices reflecting an autonomous view of writing (Paul and Sue), or dependent on the preferences of

individual academics and separated from explicit writing support (Martin). The following section explores themes emerging across the study more broadly which point to some of the consequences of this dominance of writing as skills.

Consequences for teachers and students

The conceptual separation of writing from disciplinary learning and meaning-making has consequences for the lived experience of teachers, for their practices and so for student writers themselves. One consequence emerging from this study was that of disengagement. Metaphors suggesting an element of mechanical or superficial engagement with student writing abounded in participants' accounts of their work across the study: they often talked about what they did to help students 'play the game' safely, learn the 'tricks and tips', 'get through the academic hoops' and feed the HE 'sausage machine'. This suggests that academic teachers, as well as students, are at risk of engaging in activities around student writing which have little meaning or purpose for them as *teachers of their subject* and which threaten to reduce them to cogs in a machine for churning out employable graduates.

Another consequence of dominant discourses which frame writing as a side issue, rather than being central to learning at university, is that the work it entails is perceived to occupy a marginal area of pedagogic responsibility. Many decisions about whether and how to engage with students around writing appeared to depend on individual discretion, e.g. Martin resists the attempts of his 'educationalist' colleague ('always on our case to do things properly') to introduce team-wide feedback practices, and as illustrated earlier, chooses not to raises issues of difference. The study shows that this marginal location for writing work is bound up with issues of identity and status for university teachers: their engagement in writing work reflects how they perceive themselves and are perceived by others in the institution including managers, colleagues and students. Across the study, while participants sometimes sought visibility for some of this work within their disciplines – for

example if it chimed with institutional agendas such as employability – they also saw risks to professional identity in taking an interest in student writing. For example, one participant, Dan, (Geography, Russell Group) remarked: 'You wouldn't [want to] be seen to devote too much attention to writing skills, that ain't going to get you a professorship, you know what I mean?'

One further consequence of the marginal positioning of writing work is that it is subject to informal mechanisms in which the distribution of workload is relatively ad hoc, and open to unfairness. For example, Robert, teaching Geography in a Post-92 institution, explains that in cases where students do seek face-to-face advice from disciplinary colleagues on their writing:

> If you're available as a member of staff with an open door quite often you end up being the person who fields these enquiries and perhaps **other colleagues don't even realise that that's happening**, I'm sure they're quite happy for colleagues who do it to continue do it [researcher's emphasis].

Robert appears to feel that such 'drop-in' work is to some extent hidden, perhaps conveniently so for some colleagues. A different example is furnished by Emma (Computer Science, Russell Group). Although English is Emma's second language, she takes responsibility for helping third/fourth year students with the 'language side of things', because her ('native-speaker') colleague, a more long-standing staff member 'says his English is appalling … so he lets me do the language correction.' One reading of this situation (not necessarily Emma's) is that writing work, like other less favoured tasks in higher education, is being unevenly distributed along lines of institutional status, partly because of omission or even 'learned incompetence' (Worthington and Hodgson, 2005) by others, in this case on the part of a 'native speaker' colleague.

These difficulties may be exacerbated where students' perceptions of their entitlement are greater than the teacher's. For example, Angela (Oxbridge) describes a dilemma she faces in supporting one student who 'really wants a lot of feedback' before as well as after he has submitted an assignment:

> **this isn't really my job** … I think the distinction [between what is and is not my job] won't be clear to [students] … it's sort of a deeper structural thing and it's also possibly my fault for not managing their expectations accordingly … they're always [saying] 'oh really sorry to pester you' [researcher's emphasis].

Here, Angela feels that her role does not strictly include an expectation that she will provide formative feedback on assignments; on the other hand, students may expect or at least hope such pre-submission feedback will be available. Angela has to manage expectations partly set up elsewhere, but not built in at a structural level to the working set-up. Moreover, she works in a context where, as a more approachable, younger and female graduate student teacher, she may be the obvious first port of call for students who want help in developing their academic writing.

These examples illustrate that, drained of perceived relevance to the role of teaching in the disciplines, academics' work with student writers was often either endured as a routine 'extra' requirement, undertaken in a spirit of remediation to prepare the ground for (separate) disciplinary learning, or passed elsewhere. Sometimes, as a means of resolving competing pressures of heavy demands and scarce resources, participants in this study drew on the labour of others in their disciplines who were even more marginal to the institution, in a manner analogous to 'outsourcing'. For example, Dan (Russell Group) describes a tutorial system in which smaller groups of six to seven students are assisted with their studies; this is where work on academic writing fits explicitly into the curriculum. Closer inspection of the session schedule indicates that approximately half are in fact run by postgraduates, responsible for covering topics such as 'essay-writing', 'reference lists' and 'plagiarism' and for marking the bulk of tutorial assignments. Tom (Oxbridge) expresses a strong view that because of increasing pressure to publish, tutorial work will be increasingly done by

postgraduates. Angela, also at Oxbridge but in a different disciplinary location, is one such graduate teacher.

Discussion

It is important to stress that this study did not set out to evaluate teaching and is not a criticism of 'poor' teaching – on the contrary, many if not all of those taking part were committed teachers and were able to talk about a range of initiatives and practices which took student writing extremely seriously. Some had been identified as excellent teachers within and beyond their institutions. Rather, the analysis above points beyond individual teachers and learners towards institutional practices shaped by dominant and not-so-dominant discourses, and suggests that disciplinary writing work assigned (formally or otherwise) to academic teachers is frequently positioned at the rather blurred boundaries between what is and is not considered to be part of the job. Attention to the perspectives of academics themselves highlighted a view of pedagogic practices not merely as isolated pedagogical choices, but in the context of participants' universities as workplaces: the mental, emotional and physical demands placed on them as employees; the time, money and recognition allocated (or not) to particular activities; institutional working cultures. From the teacher perspective, work with student writers and their texts has to be resourced in a variety of ways: materially, for example in terms of time, space, and effort; symbolically, through understandings of what is valuable and worthwhile, and through positive identities and statuses that are invoked by particular practices in particular institutional locations. Particular forms of work are valued and so resourced at institutional level, other practices (including much that occurs around student writing) may depend on individuals or smaller groups of colleagues, and thus have to be resourced materially from more informal sources, at the margins of the job, particularly in terms of time, space and energy. The contradictions between effective, writing-aware pedagogies and low staff/student ratios can be reconciled at institutional level by pushing writing and writing-related work further to the hidden margins of the disciplines: the work may be 'outsourced', if not to discrete language provision, to those in the disciplines perceived by

students as more accessible or to individuals of lower status. This argument echoes the active debate which has occupied the Composition community in the US around 'the sort of important work that does not show up in university book keeping' (Crowley 2002: ix). There are also parallels with the concept of 'shadow work' (Butterwick and Dawson 2005: 61) in higher education. Work around writing done by participants in this study often took place in the institutional shadows: because it was constructed in discourse as separate from the disciplinary endeavour, such work was liable to be unevenly and perhaps unfairly distributed, subject to local negotiations and to power relationships between individuals in academic contexts (ibid; Worthington and Hodgson 2005). Academic teachers in the study often felt that low value was placed on writing work by their students, colleagues and managers, providing evidence that the 'Cinderella' status for language work, powerfully demonstrated by Turner in the context of specialist domains such as EAP (2004; Blythman and Orr 2006) applies equally to discipline-based writing work. This low status both drives and is driven by a conceptual separation between writing and disciplinary learning and knowledge-making, in a spiral which threatens the role of writing as a meaningful mode of disciplinary communication at undergraduate level.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that dominant, autonomous discourses of academic writing as 'skills' – play a key role in frustrating attempts to integrate student writing and writing work with disciplinary pedagogic practices. The deep entanglement of language with disciplinary thinking, argument, knowledge, representation and learning is routinely obscured. While individual academic teachers' own disciplinary engagement gives them potentially incomparable access to an integrated understanding of the role of reading and writing in knowledge-making in their subject, in the complex lived realities of everyday practice, this integration is frequently buried, sidelined or hidden by the presence of other, powerful discourses which tend to drive writing and learning apart. Glimmers of practice where writing and learning were combined both for academic teachers and potentially their

students emerged in many cases against a far duller background, in which a discursive separation of writing and disciplinary learning/teaching, and the resulting marginalisation of writing work, combined to produce alienation and a strong feeling that neither 'academic' nor 'pedagogic' purposes were being served.

However, in the research taken as a whole, there were many moments where academic teachers were drawn to engage with student writing as learning, moments often brought to light through the building of detailed ethnographic case studies. It is important to acknowledge that there is something positive to build on here: as illustrated by the three case studies, moments frequently emerged in which the role of written language in knowledge-making was implicitly understood by academic teachers as a 'live' dimension of study and scholarship in their discipline, even if often the centrality of writing was not explicitly recognised. This would suggest that one way of developing academic teachers' practice around student writing would be to focus their attention on what it is 'in it' for them not only as teachers but as scholars critically interrogating the nature of knowledge in their own disciplines, and to bring to light the epistemological nature of language which many thoughtful academic teachers are already drawing upon in *parts* of their work. This suggests a role for writing and staff developers in working collaboratively to redefine writing work *as* disciplinary teaching, to help academic teachers see why their expertise is essential – not just for pastoral support or employability development - but because 'the forms of writing in a discipline both construct and are constructed by the culture of enquiry in the discipline' (Chanock 2007: 273). A proliferation of evidence from WID-based programmes and academic literacies-inspired interventions supports this argument (e.g. see Clughen and Hardy 2012; Deane and O'Neill 2011). A pedagogical approach to writing as integral to disciplinary practice is consistent with broader contemporary arguments in higher education pedagogy in favour of "signature pedagogies" which seek to move away from 'skills acquisition' to epistemological, context-sensitive approaches which treat disciplinary practices as integral to the learning of 'content' in particular fields because they "implicitly define what counts as knowledge in a field and how things become known… how knowledge is analysed, criticized, accepted or discarded"

(Shulman 2005, 54). However, more work is needed to bring an understanding of learner writing as disciplinary meaning-making practice to bear on the development of contextualised, professionally relevant pedagogies (e.g. see Rai, 2014).

The findings of this paper indicate further that the institutional context is important in throwing its weight behind some discourses – such as that of 'skills' - more heavily than others, for example through the circulation of centrally sourced givens and values, such as the potential to be stigmatised for paying attention to writing, or through the allocation of resources, for example where insufficient time is allocated to formative as well as summative feedback on student texts. Institutional conditions and priorities can support, or hinder, attempts to bring writing and learning together. If engagement with student writing were to be *recognised institutionally* as closer to the core of disciplinary scholarship, the demands it entails might begin to be more manageable, and more rewarding, for individual teachers. If writing means working with the stuff of meaning in the discipline, and is not just a set of techniques, then its development sits uneasily within a time-pressured, assessment-driven model of HE. But to respond to such conflicts by relegating this work to those at the disciplinary margins (or simply to make it 'disappear' into the evenings and homes of academic teachers, see Tuck 2012) is ineffective as a means of sustaining the conditions in which student writing can flourish. Postgraduates and early career academics have much to offer *and to gain* from engaging with students and colleagues about writing in their discipline (Creme and McKenna 2010), but the intellectual and pedagogical resources they bring through their interim positioning, like those of students, need to be more widely valued.

Above all, the findings of this study provide good evidence that it is important to take teachers' lived experience into account when seeking to understand student writing and how best to work with student writers. It is important to both acknowledge the costs and champion the benefits to individuals of new ways of working, and to nurture institutional climates in which disciplinary writing work is

valued and rewarded rather than stigmatised. If such work is accorded lowly status, consigned to the invisible margins, seen as only for those who care more about students than their research career, there is little reason to believe that academic teachers in the disciplines will be motivated to take responsibility for student writing in a productive way.

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Word count: 7891