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'We do not have a writing culture': exploring the nature of 'academic drift' through a study of lecturer perspectives on student writing in a vocational university

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'We do not have a writing culture': Exploring the nature of 'academic drift' through a study of lecturer perspectives on student writing in a vocational university.

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4 'We do not have a writing culture': Exploring the nature of 'academic drift' through a
5 study of lecturer perspectives on student writing in a vocational university.
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10 **Abstract**

11 *Vocational universities are increasingly becoming susceptible to pressures associated with the*
12 *phenomenon known as 'academic drift'. Yet the specific influence of such pressures is experienced*
13 *differently at various institutional levels and by different stakeholders in such universities. Exploring*
14 *lecturers' understanding and perceptions of student academic writing can make visible the ways in*
15 *which these pressures are realised, for example in the types of writing given value and writing*
16 *pedagogies deemed suitable in the context of the vocational university. In this paper we report on an*
17 *ethnographically shaped study exploring lecturers' writing pedagogies and perceptions of students as*
18 *academic writers at a South African vocational university. The study analytically illustrated how*
19 *wider socio-political, regulatory and ideological framings of these universities was implicated in*
20 *lecturers' writing practices and pedagogies. The study found that lecturers and students were*
21 *generally constricted by narrow vocationalist agendas, which reinforced negative conceptions of*
22 *students as academic writers. Our findings suggest that while the explicit impact of academic drift*
23 *drivers was minimally felt at the undergraduate diploma level of study in our research site, this*
24 *appeared to close off the potential for writing to act as a means to facilitate students' epistemic*
25 *access to their disciplines.*
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40 **Keywords**

41 Vocational university, academic drift, student academic writing, writing pedagogies, South Africa
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44 **Introduction**

45 The importance of academic writing, both as a signifier of intellectual acumen and aid in securing
46 graduate employment and subsequent advancement, is widely assumed by universities.
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48 Additionally, university assessment regimes, dominated by the requirement to produce written texts
49 to demonstrate learning, further cement the status of academic writing as a valued academic
50 practice. The ways in which institutions understand and construct writing practices also offer an
51 illuminating means whereby wider socio-political or regulatory framings, ideologies and values can
52 be investigated. Academic writing practices can therefore act as a proxy for these wider framings
53 and values. In particular, exploring the views, perceptions and writing pedagogies of subject
54 lecturers, who are the main custodians of student writing development and support in the
55 university, can help to make visible the points of connection between academic writing and these
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3 wider socio-political framings. Focusing on subject lecturers' perceptions and practices is of
4 particular interest in vocational HE (HE) contexts where the multimodal texts and literacy practices
5 encountered in such contexts are so diverse (Edwards and Smith, 2005; Edwards et al, 2013). Such
6 diversity is primarily prompted by the institutional mandate to service the dual function of preparing
7 graduates to meet the needs of both the university and professional domains. The complexity of
8 literacy, language and writing practices required by these two different domains places particular
9 demands on subject lecturers in vocational universities in ways that are not equally apparent in
10 traditional universities.
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17 Where empirical attention has been given to subject lecturers' writing pedagogies, research has
18 often focused on lecturers' individual practices, on specific interventions, or has foregrounded
19 students' perspectives on those practices (see Tuck, 2018 for a detailed discussion). Limited
20 attention has been paid to exploring the interrelationship between lecturers' practices around
21 student academic writing and broader institutional or societal contexts, with the exception of a small
22 sample of researchers working within the academic literacies perspective (for example, Tuck, 2018
23 and McKenna, 2004) The research reported here, conducted in the South African (SA), vocational HE
24 setting of the university of technology (UoT), is closely aligned to this body of research. It directly
25 focused on lecturers' perceptions and practices of student academic writing situated in this
26 institutional context, explored through ethnographically shaped data collection strategies. Key to our
27 analysis in this paper are the interrelated concepts of regulative and instructional discourses
28 (Bernstein, 1996; 2000). These two concepts allow our analysis to illustrate the how wider socio-
29 political framings, regulatory processes and values that determine the nature of the regulative
30 discourse come to influence **the practices of individual lecturers**, i.e. what is described by the
31 instructional discourse. Particularly, our analysis reveals the ways understandings of UoTs as a
32 specific institutional type become implicated in lecturers' perceptions and practices associated with
33 student writing development.
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46 Bernstein's concepts of instructional and regulative discourses are part of his more elaborate
47 theorisation of curriculum knowledge and recontextualisation. Together these theoretical concepts
48 attempt to explain how curricula and the types of knowledge which underpin them are transformed
49 and reconfigured because of ideologically charged struggles (Horden, 2014). These struggles involve
50 different actors and processes as knowledge moves from its sites of production in either disciplinary
51 or professional domains to become part of curriculum knowledge, academic subjects, pedagogic
52 practices and assessment tasks – a process known as recontextualisation (Horden, 2014; Coleman,
53 2016). As a result, curriculum decision-making comes under the influence of the prevailing moral,
54 socio-political, and regulatory norms (Shay, 2011, 2015). In vocational HE contexts,
55 recontextualisation activities which support such decision-making are particularly complex and
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3 layered since curricula ‘face both ways’ (Gamble, 2006; Wheelahan, 2010): towards the disciplines
4 and also the various professional and occupational contexts (Horden, 2014). Tracing
5 recontextualisation processes offers insight into what knowledge students are given access to.
6 Explorations can draw attention to issues of epistemic access (Horden, 2014) and how such access is
7 enacted in pedagogy in the vocational HE sector. The types of writing practices that students are
8 expected to show competence in can therefore act as a powerful marker of what knowledge is
9 privileged in the learning context (Paxton and Frith, 2013) pointing towards the extent to which
10 students’ access to academic or professional domains is being facilitated through the development
11 of these valued writing practices. In this paper we highlight how our focus on lecturers’ perceptions
12 and pedagogies of student academic writing can make these elements visible.
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20 *Using the analytical concepts of the instructional and regulative discourse*

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23 Bernstein (2000) claims that curricula are always structured according to the prevailing instructional
24 and regulative discourse (Wheelahan, 2010; Shay et al, 2011). For Bernstein (2000), the term
25 ‘discourse’ is used to mean a rule or principle which creates and determines the functions and
26 relationships that constitute curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices. The rules of the
27 instructional and regulative discourses express how the curriculum can be understood to result from
28 intensive struggle over choices around the selection and transmission of knowledge in any
29 educational programme of learning – thus encapsulating the process of curriculum
30 recontextualisation (Shay, 2011). The instructional discourse provides the rules or principles through
31 which educational instruction is conveyed. It ‘refers to what is transmitted’ (Morais, 2002, 560)
32 communicating the curriculum’s message through the subjects being taught, relations between
33 subjects and how they are taught and assessed (Coleman, 2016). Choices and practices at the level
34 of instruction determine pedagogic practices. These are in turn ‘shaped, by among other things, the
35 norms of the prevailing socio-political order’ (Shay, 2011, 317). Analytically, the regulative discourse
36 therefore functions to provide this overarching social, political and moral ordering that informs and
37 directs the ways in which meaning, norms, values and practices are given expression at the level of
38 instruction (Bernstein, 2000; Morais, 2002; Wheelahan, 2010). The relationship between these two
39 discourses are such that the regulative discourse dominates the instructional discourse in that the
40 ‘attitudes and values, rules of conduct and principles of social order’ (Morais, 2002, 562) are
41 intimately implicated in what content and knowledge is included in curricula and how it is
42 transmitted in pedagogic practice. Therefore, choices available to lecturers at the level of instruction
43 or pedagogy, may, for example, come under the influence of values held within the wider sector
44 about the place and status of UoT institutions and their qualifications; what Coleman (2016) refers
45 to as the sectoral regulative discourse.
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3 Our research is concerned with investigating how UoT lecturers' writing practices come under the
4 influence of socio-political and ideological pressures that operate in the broader institutional,
5 sectoral and HE systems. We are especially interested in considering how the sectoral regulative
6 discourse (Coleman, 2016) and how factors embedded within it, such as dominant understandings of
7 institutional differentiation in the SA HE system, construct lecturers' perceptions about student
8 writers and shape their practices around student writing pedagogies. The argument we advance in
9 this paper is that alongside the perceptions and values that individual lectures may hold about
10 students, academic writing or writing pedagogies, are a range of tensions and struggles at the level
11 of regulation, ideology and identity linked to the UoT which filter into and create an 'internal order'
12 informing and regulating the possibilities available at the level of pedagogic practice. We offer
13 explanatory insights into the make-up of the sectoral regulative discourse and how these influences
14 become instantiated in the instructional discourse of lecturers' writing pedagogies. 'Academic drift'
15 (Edwards and Miller, 2008) is a particularly visible feature of institutional differentiation and a core
16 component of regulative pressures. We begin by arguing that academic drift is experienced rather
17 acutely by UoTs. Then, by exploring lecturers' perceptions and practices of student academic writing,
18 we show how academic drift pressures become visible in unexpected ways in the kinds of writing
19 and writing pedagogies valued and given legitimacy by lecturers.

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22 In the following section, we discuss some of the features that pattern the UoT sectoral regulative
23 discourse, placing particular attention on how institutional differentiation is realised. This discussion
24 suggests that in the SA system, institutions which value theoretical knowledge and research come to
25 hold more status and prestige.

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Institutional differentiation – academic drift and the shift towards conceptual coherence

The relationship between or status of universities is frequently constituted around various aspects of differentiation, where the type of knowledge prioritised within institutions act as the primary differentiator. Globally, the divide between traditional and vocational universities are frequently understood as one of knowledge differentiation – that is, whether institutions assign value to either everyday/ practical or abstract/theoretical knowledge (Horden, 2016; Shay, 2011 & 2012; Wheelahan, 2010; Young, 2013 and Muller, 2008; Perrellon, 2003). Traditional universities give credence to theoretical knowledge while vocational universities, in contrast, place more value on practical knowledge that has specific relevance to professional contexts (Codling and Meek, 2006 and Horden, 2016).

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3 Muller (2008) uses the notion of 'curriculum logics' to describe how university curricula place more
4 or less emphasis on certain knowledge types. The curriculum logic at play in traditional universities
5 tends to be guided primarily by the disciplines and conceptual knowledge, therefore displaying
6 conceptual coherence (Shay et al, 2011). In contrast, vocational universities, like UoTs, derive their
7 curriculum logic from factors external to a discipline, as the often practical knowledge required by
8 specific professions or occupations. These curricula are thus said to show contextual coherence (also
9 see Shay et al, 2011, 106). Wheelahan (2010) and Shay (2012), however stress that theoretical and
10 practical knowledge are not regarded as equal. Rather theoretical knowledge is generally regarded
11 as having more value. This has led scholars to assert the importance of foregrounding such
12 knowledge in HE qualifications irrespective of institutional type (Horden, 2016) with Wheelahan
13 maintaining that 'access to abstract knowledge is an issue of distributional justice' (2010, 1). Within
14 HE systems, the regulative discourse can be seen at play when higher value is ascribed to university
15 curricula that foreground conceptual coherence at the expense of institutions whose curricula show
16 stronger contextual coherence.

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27 In national HE systems, Bleiklie (2003) proposes that institutional differentiation can take one of two
28 paths: hierarchical or functional ordering. While hierarchical ordering allocates a specific rank
29 position to institutions based on a prescribed set of evaluation criteria (typified by global ranking
30 indices such as the Times HE World University Rankings), functional ordering recognizes the
31 differential and unique tasks and functions fulfilled by institutions. Knowledge differentiation
32 continues to be a key determinant of such ordering, and in practice most national HE systems
33 resemble more of a hierarchical–functional continuum. Echoing the claims by Horden (2016) and
34 Wheelahan (2010) that theoretical knowledge holds more value, most HE systems increasingly give
35 more recognition to institutions and institutional types that assign greater value to the pursuit of
36 theoretical knowledge and 'pure' research (Bleiklie, 2003; Codling and Meek, 2006; McFarlane,
37 2011). This shift is often understood as 'academic drift': a term used particularly within vocational
38 universities to describe the uptake and valuing of academic practices usually located in traditional
39 universities and the devaluing or dismissal of those traditionally associated with vocational
40 qualifications and institutions (Edwards and Miller, 2008).

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51 In the European HE sector, there is some acknowledgement of the converse phenomenon of
52 'vocational drift' affecting traditional universities who have also come under market pressures to
53 ensure their qualification and graduates hold more relevance and utility for outside industries and
54 professions (De Wit and Verhoeven, 2003; Perellon, 2003; Croxford and Raffe, 2015). However, the
55 strength of hierarchical ordering influences almost always ensures that the institutions with higher
56 reputational status and position, typically those serving a traditional university function, are more
57 able to sustain their advantage and thus less 'vulnerable to mission drift' (Croxford and Raffe, 2015).

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3 In contrast, those institutions at the bottom on the hierarchy who, in a bid to improve their status
4 and ascend the ranking ladder, emulate the research activities and performances of the more
5 prestigious, higher ranking universities, are more susceptible to academic drift drivers (De Wit and
6 Verhoeven, 2003 and Codling and Meek, 2006). According to Croxford and Raffe (2015), who
7 advance a specific sociological argument, the rigidity and persistence of the hierarchical ordering of
8 institutional differentiation reflects wider social structures, resulting in the paradoxical nature of this
9 trend: despite any implied specialisation accommodated in national HE systems, the hierarchical
10 ordering and dominance of uniform ranking criteria, means vocational institutions are condemned to
11 try (and to fail) to be the same as traditional universities. Functionalism is thus trumped by
12 hierarchical ordering.
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23 **Sectoral regulative discourse of the university of technology**

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25 The regulatory framework of the SA HE system recognises three distinct institutional types:
26 traditional universities, vocational UoTs and comprehensives (Cooper, 2015). These institutional
27 types are principally organised around their 'curriculum logics'. As vocational universities, UoTs
28 occupy the contextual coherence end of the continuum. Despite the veneer of institutional diversity
29 evidenced in the national institutional profile, government funding regimes which reward research
30 outcomes contribute towards the increased conformity to the global trends of academic drift and
31 hierarchical prestige (Shay et al, 2011; Kraak, 2018).
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37 Since their creation, UoTs have faced ongoing struggles linked to their academic identity and place
38 within the wider sector (Winberg, 2005). A distinct feature of the post-apartheid transformation
39 agenda, UoTs were created as an attempt to disrupt the racially differentiated university sector and
40 more effectively consolidate existing divisions between 'traditional' and 'vocational' institutions
41 (Coleman, 2016). The vocationalist objective of UoTs in the main ensures that qualifications offered
42 – predominantly undergraduate diplomas – prioritise skills development linked directly to industry-
43 referenced jobs, roles and functions (Du Pre, 2010). However, in the absence of direct policy
44 guidance explicating the 'institutional function' of UoTs (Kraak, 2018) academic drift pressures have
45 become more prominent. To enhance their university status, vocational institutions and academics
46 working in this sector have sought to assert their academic and research credibility and gain the
47 same legitimacy as their traditional university counterparts (Winberg, 2005; Kraak, 2005 & 2018;
48 McKenna and Powell, 2009; Shay et al, 2011). Despite efforts to improve their academic legitimacy
49 by bolstering research roles and outputs (Kraak, 2018), recent research by Cooper (2015) paints a
50 less optimistic picture of the status of UoTs within the wider, hierarchically ordered sector. Using
51 research activity, rather than functional role or historical and racial vestiges which defined
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3 institutions in the apartheid HE landscape, Cooper's (2015) categorisation maintains that when
4 compared to traditional universities all UoTs are in the lowest institutional category because of
5 limited publication outputs and insignificant masters and doctoral-level graduate numbers. Cooper's
6 analysis also tentatively points to a distinct social class dimension associated with student
7 enrolments at different institutional types. Croxford and Raffe (2015) confirm a similar trend in their
8 analysis of institutional diversity in the UK. UoTs have, for example, consistently attracted a
9 predominantly black student cohort (see Fisher and Scott, 2011) thus occupying a distinct place
10 within the university system in SA based on both their epistemic characteristics and their race-class
11 profiles.

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19 The sectoral regulative discourse is therefore made up of these wider trends that determine the
20 hierarchical ordering in the SA system and, in turn, the position, identity of and attitudes towards
21 the UoT within it.
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27 **Methodological orientation**

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29 The **focus of our research investigation** was to explore UoT teachers' perspectives on student writing
30 and student writers and the pedagogic practices through which they enact these perspectives. The
31 research design sought to foreground the influential role of lecturers on the learning contexts of HE
32 and their knowledge of the institutional and discursive conditions which in turn shape their practice
33 (Tuck, 2018). The research therefore honed in on the perspectives and practices of individual
34 lecturers using methodologies enabling fine-grained explorations, while still drawing on wider, socio-
35 structural analytical tools. In the first instance the data collection and analysis methods recognised
36 the interrelationship between lecturers' perceptions of student writers and the writing pedagogies
37 they deemed appropriate. Then, the analytical lenses of regulative and instructional discourses were
38 used to identify the manner in which socio-political and ideological constructions of vocational
39 education and UoTs as institutional type became instantiated in lecturers' views and classroom
40 practices around academic writing.
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50 The university where this study was located typifies the institutional profile of a UoT in many ways.
51 Mountain City UoT came into being in 2005 as a result of an institutional merger between a
52 historically black and historically white 'technikon'. Its student population, of over 35 000, is
53 predominantly 'black' (90%) and undergraduate (94%). The Faculty of Management Studies (FMS),
54 where all research participants were located, is the largest at Mountain City. With almost 13 000
55 students, 93% black and 95% undergraduate, the faculty student demographic mirrors that of the
56 institution overall.
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6 The ethnographically-shaped data collection activities were undertaken primarily through a series of
7 multiple interviews with seven lecturers who taught on two distinct diploma courses in FMS.
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9 Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select participants and the final participants reflected
10 staff demographics at the institution. Two participants held doctoral level qualifications, and
11 alongside some undergraduate teaching they also supervised masters and doctoral students. One of
12 the participants had an established academic publication record, while the other participants
13 defined their primary role as lecturer. The in-depth interviews were dialogic and ethnographic (Lillis,
14 2008). They were organised around three broad topic areas exploring 1) participants' biographical
15 and academic histories, 2) their understandings of student writing in the university and their writing
16 pedagogies and, 3) their insights into and perceptions of the wider institutional conditions that
17 framed their academic activities. As part of the interview process a form of 'text-based interviewing'
18 (Prior, 2004:189) allowed us to use textual artefacts in the form of curriculum documents,
19 PowerPoint lesson slides, marked assignments and screenshots of online assignments uploaded via
20 the institutional learner management system, as prompts for lecturers' to discuss their pedagogic
21 practices. These documents were used to reinforce and confirm lecturer accounts of institutional
22 processes and procedures or to evidence pedagogic practices. Our analysis framework was guided
23 by the analytical lenses of regulative and instructional discourse. Our initial data sets of 21
24 transcribed interviews were subject to data structuring activities that sought to develop a 'set of
25 analytic categories' or codes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:161) which were guided by our initial
26 research problems and thus focused on lecturer views of their students as academic writers, writing
27 pedagogies, curriculum practices and values, institutional conditions, functions and reputational
28 status of their courses and the institution. Regulative and instructional discourse as theoretical
29 concepts there then retrospectively mapped onto these codes, in a manner similar to that adopted
30 by Coleman (2012) as a way of making visible how broader contextual factors play a role in
31 curriculum and pedagogic practices associated with student academic writing. Data was analysed in
32 terms of thematic content and how this threw light on principles and rules which constituted writing
33 curriculum and pedagogy.
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54 Findings

55 In this section, we present our findings in the form of two broad overlapping thematic threads. The
56 first of these illustrates the textual practices, types of writing and writing pedagogies that are
57 promoted and given value in the research sites. Here insights into the nature of the instructional
58 discourse and the curriculum enactments of the *what* with respect to student academic writing
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3 development, are offered. Particularly, our findings focus on how students and their ability to
4 engage with the writing demands of the university are described by lecturers and how these views
5 determine the writing development pedagogies lecturers deem appropriate within their specific
6 diploma contexts. We are concerned with *how* the influence of the regulative discourse can be
7 traced through the instructional discourses implied by lecturers' writing pedagogies. Finally, in the
8 second thematic thread we highlight lecturers' perceptions and understanding of their UoT
9 institutional context and the extent to which institutional conditions, which enact aspects of the
10 regulative discourse enable or restrain particular views of academic writing. In this way, our research
11 provides insights not only into what lecturers think about student writers and how they respond to
12 academic writing development, but also point to some of the reasons *why*.

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21 *Instructional discourse: what textual practices, types of writing and writing pedagogies are*
22 *privileged*

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24 Generally, lecturers in the study distinguished between the different forms of writing that students
25 need to become familiar **with** and demonstrate competency in. Distinctions were based on the
26 utilisation and value these genres have in either target industries or professions served by the
27 qualification or on the general academic environment of the university. For example, as Sapna, an
28 academic practices lecturerⁱⁱ explains, 'So if you're working for a company, you have to write
29 business letters. ...So basically we're (lecturers) looking at what they (students) would use in a work
30 environment...'. This points to how the written genres and writing practices used in industry become
31 a focal element when curriculum and pedagogic choices are made. Curriculum and learning
32 outcomes are also firmly aligned to industry requirements, as noted by Robert, a subject lecturer
33 who teaches on the Public Management diploma

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41 *...well my perception of student writing is that one needs to look in terms of the outcomes —*
42 *then our specific communication is geared towards preparing people for management*
43 *positions in the public service. Now that would be one of the outcomes...Our major aim is to*
44 *prepare people for industry. People who study further would of course be exposed to the more*
45 *academic side of things, like proposal writing...*

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47 Professional textual practices and writing genres are distinguished from 'the more academic side of
48 things', by implication, referring to academic essays or as Robert suggests 'proposal writing'.

49 Robert's example appears to suggest that proposal writing is an academic text type that students
50 might only be exposed to after their initial undergraduate diploma. This highlights an instance of
51 how differential exposure to the written practices of the university, premised on academic
52 progression beyond diploma level studies, is experienced. It also hints at how the influences of
53 academic drift might be experienced differently depending of the levels of study (e.g.,
54 undergraduate or postgraduate) or whether you are a student or lecturer.

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3 An example from the Marketing Management department explicates how the written genres in the
4 undergraduate diploma course validates those in the target profession. The recontextualisation of
5 the Marketing Plan as a core textual artefact of this profession results in the significant curriculum
6 and pedagogic attention it gets in the diploma. This attention ensures that students become familiar
7 with the stylistic and structural features of the plan and that they develop increased levels of
8 sophistication and expertise in the construction and writing of this text as they move into the senior
9 and final years of their diploma. When describing the Marketing Plan, Clive, a subject lecturer
10 explained that its stylistic features are characterised as being ‘...not like an essay, so there’s not
11 much use of continuous prose’. Instead, ‘It is mostly tables, bullets and small paragraphs...and it is
12 very technical’. Janet, another lecturer, suggests how contextual realities associated with industry
13 are taken into consideration when students produce the Marketing Plan. The premise that ‘business
14 people don’t have a lot of time to read certain things’ becomes a key factor when drawing students’
15 attention to the significance of the specific stylistic features that prescribe the technical and concise
16 writing this text type demands.
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27 In general, non-vocationally oriented writing for diploma students primarily took the form of essays
28 and appeared to be located in specific subjects in this Marketing Management course. Such
29 curriculum organisation is a fairly common practice in UoT courses, where most writing practices
30 associated with more academic-type activities associated with the university are undertaken in
31 content or ‘theory’ subjects (see Coleman, 2012 and 2016). Njabulo, a subject lecturer notes that
32 ‘The writing type in (my) subject is predominantly essay writing. My students have to justify what
33 they say. They have to explain to the reader why they are saying that’. In contrast to the concise
34 writing of the Marketing Plan, the essay, for Njabulo, appears to value the justification of ideas and
35 detailed explanations. Njabulo’s description of essay writing further signals a detachment from the
36 textual practices strongly associated with the technical and concise styles valued when constructing
37 the Marketing Plan. To highlight the contrasting textual prescriptions of the Marketing Plan which
38 places heavy reliance on bullet lists, Njabulo asserts, ‘I don’t like bullet points. They (students) can
39 use bullet points and I teach them how to use it. If they are giving me a list, they give me these
40 things and they are going to discuss them further down under the bullet points’. Njabulo is therefore
41 accentuating the textual and discursive differences between the two common genres in this diploma
42 and is possibly also alluding to his view that the professional genres are somewhat inferior to those
43 with a stronger theoretical basis.
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59 Lecturers’ descriptions of the contrasting textual practices associated with the industry referenced
60 Marketing Plan and those more closely aligned to the academy suggest that the curriculum is

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3 attempting to service both the theoretical and practical interests implied in the educational ethos of
4 the UoT sector. The inclusion of these textual practices highlights how these dual educational
5 intentions are configured into the curriculum logic of undergraduate diploma courses. However, the
6 prominence of professional written genres and the attention given through pedagogic practices to
7 ensuring that students develop the necessary competencies associated with these genres, suggests a
8 curriculum logic that points in the direction of contextual coherence. The essay when described is
9 also contrasted to the stylistic and rhetorical features prized in the professional genres. Lecturers'
10 descriptions placed less emphasis on how specific disciplinary conventions or norms might be
11 important for shaping the textual practices associated with the construction of these academic
12 essays. These views help bolster the claim that the curricula in the research sites are aligned to the
13 contextual logic of the professions. Additionally, it suggests that academic drift drivers are not taken
14 up by lecturers in relation to their pedagogic practices in undergraduate diploma teaching.

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16 The lecturers held various views about students and their ability to meet the multiple personal,
17 curricula or pedagogic expectations of the course and the university more generally. In many ways
18 these views reflected how UoT students are frequently positioned in the wider sector as being in
19 deficit because of both race-class and institutional hierarchies. Lecturers spoke of students as
20 arriving at the university without the appropriate language, writing or dispositional requirements
21 needed to function or participate in ways deemed suitable by the lecturer or by specific
22 departmental or institutional norms. Njabulo highlights how students' backgrounds preclude them
23 from embracing the focus on writing foregrounded in his subject and those generally associated with
24 the university.

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...most of the students will come from backgrounds where reading and writing is not embraced. It's much more oral. So if the students had to talk, they'll do much better than if they write

Yet Njabulo still sees this oral focus in students' communicative repertoires as a strength while both Sapna and Angie conclude that students' have specific oral communication barriers. Angie notes that 'The students that I have don't like to speak in class' while for Sapna such reluctances can be attributed to 'the language barrier' when she says 'I think some of the challenges is the fact that some of these students really don't speak English, they struggle...'.
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There was also an expectation that arriving university students would have mastered a set of 'writing basics' which would enable them to immediately and appropriately complete the various writing related activities and tasks required by individual lecturers. Angie, an academic practice lecturer, characterising her students' competence in writing basics, highlights that students' writing tends to have 'very poor sentence structure, poor spelling, poor cohesion. Some of them don't know what a paragraph is and still write bullets or numbers in the margin'. In many ways these

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3 descriptions of students reflect dominant and pervasive perceptions that position the majority of
4 students in the sector as in deficit of the prerequisite intellectual, socio-cultural and dispositions
5 characteristics required of university study (Boughey and McKenna, 2016). However, the manner in
6 which individual universities and institutional types are starting to reflect particular race-class
7 divisions in their student demographics means that the impact of such deficit constructions are
8 amplified in the UoT setting – which primarily services the university access and success aspirations
9 of black students from low socio-economic and under-resourced schooling backgrounds. Thus
10 lecturers' understanding and construction of their pedagogic roles associated with student academic
11 writing was strongly filtered through these prevailing assumptions. Most of the lecturers in our study
12 therefore saw value in ensuring that their writing pedagogies attempted to address, in various ways,
13 the perceived gaps or omissions in their students' academic writing. In this way their writing
14 pedagogies would help students to develop suitable levels of competency in the types of writing
15 privileged in the university and target professions.
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28 *Regulative discourse: how institutional conditions shape perceptions and pedagogic*
29 *practices around academic writing*

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31 Many of the research participants were able to make some connection between their personal views
32 and understandings about students as academic writers, their approaches to writing pedagogies and
33 how these issues were understood and enacted through, especially, curriculum practices at
34 institutional level. The institution was regarded as having 'very strict parameters' instantiated
35 through prescribed syllabi and 'standardised assessments' which constrained the kinds of teaching
36 and learning practices accommodated. Clive made a direct association between the institutional
37 environment and what he felt was a deficit positioning of students. This he felt limited his pedagogic
38 practices. In a fictive scenario he described, he suggests how he might be able to become uncoupled
39 from these current curriculum and pedagogic constraints:
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47 *If we were doing teaching differently and I could have one-on-one relationships with students,*
48 *then it wouldn't be a deficit model or it wouldn't be a deficit because...I could teach them*
49 *based on where they're at but because we have standardised syllabuses and standardised*
50 *assessment it is a deficit and that's a reality*

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52 Clive furthermore draws a direct connection between his pedagogies and his institutional location
53 observing that 'If we're talking about a different type of educational context, then my ideas would
54 be different. There would be no deficit'.
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57 Njabulo recounted how when perplexed by problems he was encountering around student academic
58 writing during his early years as a lecturer in his department, he was unable to find reasonable
59 explanations from his more experienced colleagues. He later attributed his colleagues' views that
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3 student writing and subject teaching were unrelated, as a consequence of the institution not valuing
4 academic writing as an essential part of how knowledge was constructed and expressed in a
5 discipline.
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9 *I started to engage with a few colleagues about language and I was getting responses that I*
10 *couldn't quite understand because I thought I was talking about something which was*
11 *fundamental in the teaching of students. But I was not getting an engagement in that until*
12 *later on I realised that we do not have a writing culture.*
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14 The lack of 'a writing culture' was ascribed by some participants to a larger identity struggle inherent
15 in the UoT because of its historical roots in the technikon sector. Janet as one of the participants
16 who witnessed the move from the technikon to the UoT experienced some of the consequences on
17 her own career progression. She firstly suggests that the lack of an academic writing culture
18 experienced in the contemporary institutional context can be attributed to the rigid vocational focus
19 of the technikon environment.
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25 *I just think if you're looking at you know, where we came from in terms of the technikons, it*
26 *was your industry experience that counted so you always kind of relied on that. We didn't have*
27 *this whole academic writing culture*
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29 Janet's observation suggests that the distinctions between 'university/academic' and 'professional'
30 textual practices that are pervasively enacted through curriculum and pedagogy can be traced to
31 deeper and more entrenched distinctions which also define and pattern the identity constructions of
32 academics in this UoT setting. Janet's reflection on her own identity within her changing institutional
33 climate reinforces her sense of 'academic drift':
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38 *There's no way that I would survive, if you look at the environment today, okay, with my*
39 *current qualifications because unfortunately, teaching is not the main focus at the institution.*
40 *You must have a balance with research, which I don't have and your research is publishing. It's*
41 *not going to conferences, it's not presenting, it's not that. It's not even studying further...It's*
42 *about publication*
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45 The pressure to publish and the recognition it is given within the institution, is however, not seen as
46 being matched by a supporting or enabling culture that promotes academic writing. Robert recounts
47 that when he permanently joined the university he experienced a marked difference from the
48 traditional university where he had completed much of his postgraduate studies; at the UoT 'there
49 was no real focus on writing for publication, no focus...institutionally, it must be something like, it
50 must be a culture, you know'.
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55 Even when the institution started to explicitly focus on research Robert felt that this did not
56 sufficiently translate into 'enthusiasm in creating a culture for writing'.
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60 *But I think when we are taking on the research role, from a technikon because we want to*
compete with universities because we're also now all of a sudden, a university of

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3 *technology...But now all of a sudden you're going nowhere if you don't do research, going*
4 *nowhere if you don't publish*
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6 While acknowledging the increased importance of research in the institutional profile, this shift is
7 still regarded with suspicion—as being driven by instrumentalist motives to ‘compete with
8 (traditional) universities’.
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11 Discussion

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16 A key assertion advanced in this paper is that the kinds of texts and writing pedagogies lecturers in
17 our study deemed appropriate in the context of their diploma courses reflect wider, dominant
18 values, attitudes and regulatory prescriptions associated with vocational education and specifically
19 UoT qualifications We describe how the instructional discourse asserts what textual practices and
20 types of writing are given status pedagogically, while also showing how lecturers’ perceptions of
21 student writers, and pedagogic responses to their students’ writing needs, reflect and are
22 constructed by social values and attitudes circulating in the sectoral regulative discourse. Through
23 our focus on the interrelationship between classroom practices and influences located in the wider
24 sectoral context, we are able to illuminate how the writing pedagogies of the UoT lecturers in our
25 research site are implicated in and constrained by how the UoT as an institutional type is
26 ideologically and structurally positioned within and by the broader university system. Our
27 ethnographically shaped explorations of the written texts, practices and pedagogies of academic
28 writing show that there are particular consequences for the type of academic writing practices to
29 which, especially, diploma students are given access. In particular, our study draws attention to how
30 influences on writing pedagogies by the sectoral regulative discourse have the potential to constrain
31 student academic access and true democratic participation in society. Conversely, analytically
32 exploring the consequences of writing pedagogies which resist the influences of such sectoral
33 regulative discourses could provide insight into how such classroom practices might offer wider
34 change and encourage epistemic access for students.
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49 Our findings show the enactment of the strong vocationalist agenda associated with UoTs through
50 the type of written genres valued in the research sites of two undergraduate diploma courses. The
51 course curricula show the clear privileging of written genres and textual practices deemed relevant
52 and given validation in professional practice. While there is recognition of the academic location of
53 the diploma courses in the broader university sector, any direct impact of academic drift agendas on
54 undergraduate studies, more visible in wider institutional differentiation debates, and clearly also an
55 issue for lecturers own professional identities, was not immediately obvious in our research sites.
56 Limited evidence emerged in the data of attempts to reinforce or strengthen the alignment between
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3 subjects and their particular disciplinary homes. Value was, however, accorded to students
4 becoming familiar with and gaining competence in certain written genres of the academy, with the
5 academic essay representing the primary textual artefact most associated with the university
6 domain. Lecturers tended to promote more generalist conceptualisation of the essay grounded in
7 fixed language and stylistic features that are also largely seen as transferable between different
8 subjects. As a result, pedagogic practices generally placed more attention on introducing students to
9 the technical competencies associated with such essay writing (as evidenced by the need to help
10 students master the 'writing basics') rather than overtly helping students to see how essays could
11 act a vehicle through which disciplinary meaning-making could be expressed. In this way our findings
12 echo insights and arguments raised by McKenna (2004), McKenna and Sutherland (2009) and
13 Coleman (2016) about the way in which academic writing in the UoT setting tends to construct
14 academic writing as a technical skill delinked from disciplinary knowledge making.

15
16 Lecturers' perceptions and views about their students as academic writers acted as a key catalyst for
17 organising writing pedagogies in ways that primarily focuses on ensuring that students become
18 proficient in the professional written genres deemed necessary. These perceptions of students were
19 for the most part underpinned by prevailing and dominant discursive framings of students as being
20 in deficit of the written, communicative, dispositional and cultural norms and practices of the
21 university. When viewed within the context of the UoT setting, these perceptions also reflect the
22 impact of race-class dimensions of the university system in South Africa (Cooper, 2015), with
23 students' low socio-economic and under-resourced schooling backgrounds becoming the key
24 reasons of these presumed deficits. Although practices varied, lecturer assumptions about students
25 often encouraged the continued reliance on student academic writing pedagogies aimed at
26 addressing or fixing the perceived gaps and omissions which are regarded as inherent to the student.
27 Coupled with the strong instrumentalist vocational agendas of the UoT, which most of the lecturers'
28 valued and readily accepted, pedagogic practices showed the strong adoption of approaches that
29 foregrounded the recontextualised communicative and dispositional norms and practices of
30 industry. A key outcome of this overall curriculum and pedagogic focus was to ensure that students
31 would be able to signal their inclusion in their chosen profession through the adoption and
32 demonstration of competence in the written and communicative repertoires validated in these
33 target professions.

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35 There is a sense emerging from data for this study that UoT lecturers feel compelled to offer
36 students the best possible option to attain success in their professional careers – and thus place
37 their pedagogic focus on 'the most visible aspects of writing' (Lillis, 2006, 32). Within the already
38 narrow prescriptions of the institution's vocational agenda such strategies have the consequence of
39 limiting the scope for considering or implementing either alternative writing pedagogies that might

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3 look towards the disciplines for validation or the overt recognition of communicative and cultural
4 resources students already possess. Instead lectures and their writing pedagogies appear to be
5 caught in a self-reinforcing cycle where dominant discourses of student deficiencies and the
6 reputational status of the UoT as serving students least prepared for university learning, coupled
7 with its instrumentalists' vocational agenda, conspire to place enormous pressure on lecturers to
8 adopt pedagogic strategies most likely to ensure that students and their writing skills are favourably
9 recognised and accepted by their respective industries. The tensions created by such pressures and
10 their impact on UoT lecturers' pedagogic practices are poignantly raised by Alexander (2018) in her
11 critical interrogation of her writing pedagogies. She asserts that institutional discourses of student
12 deficit reinforce the uptake of a study skills approach to writing, which in turn scuppers her efforts to
13 meaningfully recognise the varied linguistic and other resources students bring to their studies and
14 to provide opportunities for students to engage in academic meaning-making. Supported by
15 Wheelahan's argument that access to theoretical and abstract knowledge especially by students
16 completing vocational qualifications, would increase their opportunities for educational progression
17 and their capacity to engage and contribute to 'society's conversations' (2010:16), we see the
18 potential benefit of academic drift influences for deepening and broadening the academic writing
19 practices and skills UoT students are currently exposed to. When considered in light of the
20 acknowledged effects of academic drift in the sectoral regulative discourse, our research
21 interestingly shows how minimal these influences are on the kinds of academic writing which
22 diploma students are expected to master. Rather, our findings highlight the pressures placed on
23 (predominantly undergraduate) lecturers to respond and conform to the more narrowly defined
24 vocationalist and instrumental institutional functions associated with UoTs in the sectoral regulative
25 discourse (see Coleman, 2016).

45 **Concluding comments**

46 The SA HE system is becoming more susceptible to the pressures of institutional convergence fuelled
47 by hierarchical ordering mechanisms that encourage institutions to chase status and prestige
48 indicators determined by their research outputs. In this prevailing climate, the task of securing
49 validation for UoTs and their unique contribution to the sector and the development imperatives of
50 the SA society, is an increasingly arduous task. While socio-political and ideological manoeuvrings
51 are played out at the national level, the direct impact, especially, of academic drift drivers are
52 experienced differentially at various institutional levels and by different stakeholders in the system.
53 The research reported here focused explicitly on the experiences of UoT subject lecturers but was
54 also able to consider implications for undergraduate diploma students in the UoT. By viewing
55 academic writing as a proxy for wider socio-political, regulatory and ideological framings of the UoT
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3 sector and then exploring how these wider understandings become implicated in lecturers'
4 perceptions and pedagogic practices of student academic writing, our research has been able to
5 make visible what knowledge is privileged, the extent to which students are given access to different
6 knowledge types valued in curricula, and importantly why these positions hold. We argue that an
7 exploration of what happens in student academic writing pedagogy can provide insight into the
8 broader sectoral regulative discourse that affects and directs the types of writing and pedagogies
9 deemed suitable in the context of a UoT. The pedagogic practices of lecturers in our study show that
10 specific written genres, primarily relevant to target professions, are validated because of narrow and
11 prescriptive conceptualisations of vocational HE given status in the sectoral regulative discourse.
12 This is despite the identity contestations introduced by academic drift pressures acting on the entire
13 sector. The influence of academic drift is thus felt in unexpected ways, particularly at the level of
14 pedagogy. As a result less room is allowed for writing pedagogies able to accommodate genres and
15 practices that service conceptual knowledge and meaning-making valued by disciplines. So while
16 lecturers may be trying hard to develop the kind of writing culture which might be esteemed within
17 the academic drift agenda, they and students are in practice 'locked-in' to curricular and pedagogic
18 choices that are best able to meet the demands of industry, while reinforcing generalised and
19 decontextualized notions of academic writing. Students in the UoT demography (mainly black,
20 poorer students) may therefore be pushed less in the direction of 'academic' drift and more towards
21 a version of 'vocational' drift which offers a very hollowed out version of academic learning. Our
22 research also makes clear that the current direction of institutional convergence has a profound
23 effect on reinforcing negative conceptions of UoT students as academic writers and closing off the
24 possibilities of expanding the ranges of written genres they have access to developing and becoming
25 competent in, especially during their diploma studies. The influence of academic drift agendas and
26 its uptake in undergraduate curricula, particularly through bolder inclusions of conceptual
27 knowledge, or shifting writing pedagogies, practices and assessment regimes is currently under-
28 researched. The research reported here makes an initial contribution to expanding our
29 understanding of how academic writing practices reflect wider ideological views, but also points to
30 the possibilities of what writing pedagogies offer, in that they can be harnessed to offset discourses
31 and framings that, at times, threaten to frustrate students' epistemic access to a broader range of
32 valued knowledge types.

33 Acknowledgments

34 Moeain Arend is thanked for his assistance with data collection and the initial data analysis activities
35 associated with the broader research project on which this paper is based.
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8 ⁱ Technikons represented the vocational education and training segment of the HE system during the apartheid
9 era in South Africa. They had a similar mandate as the Polytechnics in the UK and institutes of technology in
10 Australia and offered primarily undergraduate vocational diploma courses. By 2005 all technikons were
11 rebranded as universities of technology as part of the post-apartheid government's attempts to transform the
12 university sector.

13 ⁱⁱ In order to ensure a reasonable degree of privacy for our participants but without compromising the
14 importance of the specific professional and disciplinary location linked to the insights and findings of our study,
15 we use pseudonyms for all participants, a generalised description of their teaching area instead of the actual
16 subject names and changed the name of the departments to mask their identity.
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RESPONSES to REVIEWER COMMENTS from AUTHORS

Reviewer Comments	Revisions
<p>REVIEWER 1</p> <p>The paper could be strengthened by a greater discussion of the data which emerged from the textual data (i.e. curriculum documents and Powerpoint slides) which you mention in the methodology.</p>	<p>The following inclusion (in bold) was made with the previous revision (submitted 22 Sept).</p> <p><i>As part of the interview process a form of ‘text-based interviewing’ (Prior, 2004:189) allowed us to use textual artefacts in the form of curriculum documents, PowerPoint lesson slides, marked assignments and screenshots of online assignments uploaded via the institutional learner management system, as prompts for lecturers’ to discuss their pedagogic practices. These documents were also used to reinforce and confirm lecturer accounts of institutional processes and procedures or to evidence pedagogic practices.</i></p> <p>Here we provide detail of how the textual data was used to support the interview process and also how these documents were enlisted during the analysis phase as a way of reinforcing and confirming lecturer accounts. The themes discussed in our data do not draw specific attention to these documents and do not warrant the inclusion of a separate analysis of how they reinforce or highlight the description of the themes. In light of the recommendation by Reviewer 1 we have made the following inclusions (in red) to reinforce how these textual data were used as part of the ethnographically shaped data collection processes.</p>
<p>In the conclusion it is stated that ‘our study draws attention to how influences on writing pedagogies by the sectoral regulative discourse have the potential to constrain students’ academic access and true democratic participation in society’.</p> <p>The connection between this statement and the data needs to be made clearer.</p>	<p>With the previous revision submitted 22 Sept, this sentence was removed from the conclusion.</p>
<p>It would be useful to have a more thorough explanation of a ‘vocational university’ for an international audience. Does it attract a particular student body and have particular admissions arrangements and what is the nature of the curriculum on offer in vocational universities more generally as well as the institution in which the research was conducted?</p>	<p>The notion of the ‘vocational university’ both in respect to how it is understood within the broader global university sector and the specific form it takes within the South Africa context is explicated in various sections of the paper. For example;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On pages 4 & 5 a description of the core distinctions between traditional and vocational universities is presented. • On page 6 the University of Technology as a particular type of vocational university located in the SA context is described (see paragraph 3). As part of this description the type of knowledge prioritized, its roles and function with respect to type of qualifications offered and its links to industry are outlined. Also discussed are the typical student demographics (further expanded on page 7).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note 1: Reference is made to how the precursor of the UoT, the technikon, can be regarded as having had a similar mandate to the polytechnics in the UK – thus offering some correlation to an institutional type familiar to an international audience. <p>In order to reinforce the international comparison, we have included a short reference to the Australia higher education context in the end note (see below) <i>They had a similar mandate as the Polytechnics in the UK and institutes of technology in Australia and offered primarily undergraduate vocational diploma courses.</i></p>
<p>what is meant by 'individualised classroom practices'? (page 2)- do you simply mean the practices of individual lecturers?</p>	<p>The sentence has been changed to aid meaning. <i>These two concepts allow our analysis to illustrate the how wider socio-political framings, regulatory processes and values that determine the nature of the regulative discourse come to influence the practices of individual lecturers, i.e. what is described by the instructional discourse.</i></p>
<p>There are some small typos throughout, including full stops missing on page 2, 13 and 14.</p>	<p>With the previous revision of the manuscript, submitted 22 Sept, various typos and grammatical omissions were corrected.</p>
<p>Page 15 should read 'need to become familiar with and demonstrate competency in'</p>	<p>Corrected</p>
<p>REVIEWER 2</p>	
<p>The first sentence in the Methodology section says that "The aim of the study was to explore UoT teachers' perspectives on student writing and student writers and the pedagogical practices to which they enact these perspectives" (p. 7). I wonder if this is rather the means / the focus of investigation, and that the aim is to investigate the influence of regulative discourse on pedagogical practices?</p>	<p>Agreed – we have changed the sentence to appropriate reflect the focus of our investigation. <i>The focus of our research investigation was to explore UoT teachers' perspectives on student writing and student writers and the pedagogic practices through which they enact these perspectives.</i></p>
<p>On p. 14, the findings section ends with an interview quote. It may read better to end this section with an interpretative comment by the author(s), for instance by moving the sentence on line 9-13 ("While acknowledging the increased importance of research...") after the quote.</p>	<p>Corrected as suggested.</p>