

# Students' writing and the transitions from school to university: hybrid 'discourse of writing' positions of students and teachers \*

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*This paper explores one case study from PhD research into students' writing in the context of the transition from school to university, particularly focusing on 'discourses of writing and learning to write' (Ivanič, 2004) evident across the two educational levels. The data are taken from a two-year engagement in the field, following students from their last year of A-levels to their first year of undergraduate study. The case study of Kate presented here is built around two principal data sources: interview data and examples of feedback on Kate's writing collected over the two years. Ivanič's 'discourses of writing' were used as the primary lens to unpick the underlying assumptions and beliefs about writing that the participants hold, engage with and contribute to. In addition, a new assessment discourse of writing is offered as a contribution to Ivanič's framework*

**Key words:** students' writing, transition, discourse, feedback

## Introduction

The study described here is taken from an ongoing ethnographically-styled PhD study into students' writing and 'the transition' from school to university. This research is situated at the intersection between post-compulsory secondary education and higher education, and is located in the UK context where there is a 'media narrative' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) that students entering the academy cannot write and are not sufficiently prepared for the rigours of a university education (Davies, Swinburne & Williams, 2006; Lowe & Cook, 2003). Despite repeated reports in the British media about the apparent falling standards of students' literacy (Paton, 2008; Wall, 2006), relatively little empirical research has focused on the significance of the transition from school to university and its impact on students' writing. The published research into transition has tended to focus on single subjects (Ballinger, 2003; Winterson & Russ, 2009) or a broader discussion of transition-related issues (for example, Smith, 2004). However, there has been very little investigation specifically linking students' writing across a range of disciplines with the transition from A-levels, equivalent to the SSCE in Australia, to university. In particular, there has been relatively little published research into students' writing before the transition or about the discourses enacted and indexed in students' writing. It is in this empirical gap that I wish to position my research. In this paper I use the framework of 'discourses of writing' offered by Ivanič (2004) to offer exploratory analysis and discussion of one student's talk around writing and feedback received across the transition. I also contribute to Ivanič's framework by offering an additional discourse that has emerged from my data.

## Context

This research is set in a time of economic uncertainty, where the threat of a global recession still lingers, and, in the UK, university funding is being cut, student tuition fees will increase to £9000 a year and student numbers continue to rise (by 10,000 in 2010/11, HEFCE, 2010). These economic conditions, combined with the continuing marketisation of higher education and a focus on the ‘employability’ of future graduates, arguably represent a challenge to the fundamental transformative ideology of university study, with the academy now being widely viewed as a “service provider” rather than a site of knowledge production and transfer (Mann, 2009: 2); a view which has the potential to reduce the status of academic and theoretical pursuits in the academy. Yet, despite the pessimistic forecast for future graduates, university was still a viable and attractive option for the 481,854 students who completed their A-level exams and entered higher education in the summer of 2009, which was a 5.5% increase on the previous year’s intake (UCAS, 2010).

Within a context of heightened competition for university places and decreasing graduate job opportunities in the UK, the writing stakes at higher education are arguably intensified and imbued with competitive economic capital. Given that the medium for summative assessment is usually written (Lea, 1999), the ability to ‘write well’ is fundamental to students’ success at university. If students are unable to articulate their knowledge in writing, according to the conventions and criteria imposed by awarding bodies, they will not be classified as ‘successful’. The implications of such “high stakes” writing (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p.9) are far-reaching and it is argued that the lack of clarity in the conventions that underpin writing in the academy, or the “institutional practice of mystery” to use Lillis’ (2001, p.53) phrase, is representative of the power imbued in higher education to privilege and marginalise different social groups.

‘The transition’ from school to university, and educational transition in general, is an area that has attracted plenty of attention in the last decade. While there is a growing field of exploration into the transition from A-levels to university (Ballinger, 2002, Smith, 2004; Winterson & Russ, 2009) and a substantial body of work investigating students’ writing (Ivanič, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Turner, 2001), little has been published on students’ writing within the context of this transition. The interest in the transition from school to university has, in part, been generated because students are at their most vulnerable in their first year of university (McInnis, 2001) and this can be costly for both individuals and institutions. Moreover, it has been argued that there is a general disconnect between students’ expectations and institutional expectations of higher education (Krause & Coates, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998), the consequences of which can profoundly affect the overall experience of going to university and lead to the claim that students in general are unprepared for university study (Lowe & Cook, 2003).

## Theoretical frame

Discourse provides a useful theoretical frame for exploring students’ writing in the context of transition because it allows for an exploration of the power, identities and ideologies that underpin writing for school and university. Blommaert (2005) defines discourse as “all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural and historical patterns and developments of use” (p. 3). Roz Ivanič’s 2004 paper, on ‘discourses of writing and learning to write’, offers a framework as a way to explore discourse in students’ writing and talk around writing. Six discourses of writing are

identified: *skills, creativity, process, genre, social practices* and *sociopolitical* and all index particular beliefs about writing, learning to write and approaches to the teaching of writing. For Ivanič, the six discourses map onto, and are constituted by, a multi-layered view of language, which Ivanič explicates as a conceptualisation of language which views the “textual aspects of language as embedded within, and inseparable from, mental and social aspects” (p. 222). Ivanič’s matrix is reproduced as Figure 1.

Discourses	Layer in the comprehensive view of language	Beliefs about writing	Beliefs about learning to write	Approaches to the teaching of writing	Assessment criteria
1. A SKILLS DISCOURSE	THE WRITTEN TEXT	Writing consists of applying knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and syntactic patterns to construct a text.	Learning to write involves learning sound-symbol relationships and syntactic patterns.	SKILLS APPROACHES <i>Explicit teaching</i> 'phonics'	accuracy
2. A CREATIVITY DISCOURSE		Writing is the product of the author's creativity.	You learn to write by writing on topics which interest you.	CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION <i>Implicit teaching</i> 'whole language' 'language experience'	interesting content and style
3. A PROCESS DISCOURSE	THE MENTAL PROCESSES OF WRITING	Writing consists of composing processes in the writer's mind, and their practical realization.	Learning to write includes learning both the mental processes and the practical processes involved in composing a text.	THE PROCESS APPROACH <i>Explicit teaching</i>	?
4. A GENRE DISCOURSE	THE WRITING EVENT	Writing is a set of text-types, shaped by social context.	Learning to write involves learning the characteristics of different types of writing which serve specific purposes in specific contexts.	THE GENRE APPROACH <i>Explicit teaching</i>	appropriacy
5. A SOCIAL PRACTICES DISCOURSE		Writing is purpose-driven communication in a social context.	You learn to write by writing in real-life contexts, with real purposes for writing.	FUNCTIONAL APPROACHES <i>Explicit teaching</i> PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION <i>Implicit teaching</i> 'communicative language teaching' LEARNERS AS ETHNOGRAPHERS <i>Learning from research</i>	effectiveness for purpose
6. A SOCIO-POLITICAL DISCOURSE	THE SOCIOCULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF WRITING	Writing is a sociopolitically constructed practice, has consequences for identity, and is open to contestation and change.	Learning to write includes understanding why different types of writing are the way they are, and taking a position among alternatives.	CRITICAL LITERACY <i>Explicit teaching</i> 'Critical Language Awareness'	social responsibility?

Figure 2 Discourses of writing and learning to write

Figure 1: Ivanič’s discourses of writing and learning to write (2004, p. 225)

Ivanič (2004) states clearly that the six discourses listed in Figure 1 rarely exist in isolation and are often found in hybrid forms. Ivanič describes the beliefs underpinning the *skills discourse* as the application of knowledge of “decontextualised linguistic rules and patterns” (p. 228). Accuracy and ‘correctness’ are central to this discourse, and writing is seen as a separate ‘skill’ from reading. Underlying the skills discourse is an ideological position which views writing as neutral, transferable and context-free, although along with Ivanič, I acknowledge this is an extreme description. As Ivanič points out, much policy and practice in UK writing education is underpinned by this ideology. In contrast, the *creativity discourse* indexes particular ways of thinking about writing that foreground meaning-making, therefore viewing writing as the product of the writer’s creativity and a valuable activity in its own right. With the creativity discourse, writing is evaluated for its ‘effectiveness’, a subjective process dependent on the reader/assessor’s own sense of what ‘good’ writing is, and is closely aligned to reading.

The *process discourse* of writing and learning to write is based on the belief that writing consists of the cognitive and practical processes of composition. This discourse is recognisable from references to the planning process, and Ivanič (2004) suggests that words such as “plan”, “draft”, “revision”, “editing” index this particular belief about writing (p. 232). The practical stages of the writing process lend themselves to the explicit teaching of writing, as will be seen in the data presented below. In contrast to the process discourse, the *genre discourse* is concerned more with the written product than the processes of writing, and focuses on the social context which shape and constrain writing. The principal belief underpinning this discourse is that writing is constituted by a set of text-types, which are embedded in the events in which they are written and the social purposes they are written for. Writing for the genre discourse requires knowledge of particular linguistic characteristics of different text-types and is assessed according to the ‘appropriacy’ of the written product.

The belief that underpins the *social practices discourse* is that “writing is purpose-driven communication in a social context” (p. 234), so that writing is implicitly learnt through participating in real-life literacy events with real-life purposes, and has an eye on the social meanings and values ascribed. In extension to the social practices discourse, the *socio-political discourse* of writing and learning to write is specifically interested in the dynamics of power which affect the writer’s identity and which direct, dictate and restrict what kind of and how writing is valued. Ivanič (2004) argues that writing “involves drawing on socially constructed resources, both ‘discourses’ which represent the world in particular ways, and ‘genres’ which are conventions for particular types of social interaction” (p. 238), which weave together to preserve hegemonic interests. Therefore, the belief underpinning this discourse is that writing is a complex mix of social and political factors and has implications for authors’ identities. The view of learning embedded within this discourse is one that promotes criticality: exploring the assumptions and power underlying particular types of writing and realising the potential of rejecting hegemonic types of writing and enacting sociopolitical change through literacy.

Using Ivanič’s (2004) framework, it is possible to explore the discourse positions occupied by writers in their writing and their talk around writing. This exploration is of particular significance in the context of transition because it offers insight into how the discursive practices of student writers and their assessors differ at the different educational levels and how their discourses mediate often unarticulated assumptions about language and writing. As these practices and assumptions can often be at odds, analysis of the discourses of

writing therefore offers an insightful empirical lens into students' writing throughout the transition.

## Methodology and research design

This research is grounded in a qualitative and interpretive methodology and has adopted an ethnographically styled research design, which facilitates the longitudinal and iterative nature of this particular project. A two-year engagement with the students aids the building of relationships that permit the gathering of 'thick data' (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) and, crucially, offers new empirical insight into the ways that students experience the transition from their A-level context to their chosen universities.

An important source of data for this paper is the cyclical interviews, which were semi-structured and broadly covered experiences the students offered as significant, alongside a focused lens on their writing, the texts they produced and description of how they were produced and consumed. The use of the students' own writing in the interview situation is what Ivanič (1998, p. 333) called "talk around texts" and complements the iterative methodology that is needed for a deep, context-driven inquiry into students' attitudes and practices. The interviews were conducted six times on a one to one basis with each participant, complemented by regular online interaction via Facebook. The meshing of the offline and online communication channels allows for constant virtual-participant observation, complemented by opportunities for expansion and clarification in the one to one interviews. Further to these documents, 'literacy logs' were collected at regular points throughout the two years, where the participants recorded a day's worth of literacy practices. These data help to illuminate the kinds of literacy practices the students engage with daily, and include academic, personal, work-related and leisure activities. These data also provide insight into what the students themselves consider to be literacy practices. Furthermore, pertinent documents have been collected from the 'field', such as assessment guidance material published by the examination boards, in order to inform the wider picture of writing and assessment at the departure point of the transition.

In order to explore the nature of the transition from A-levels to university as broadly as possible, 12 participants were recruited from the three principal avenues into university. Of the 12 students, 10 are 'traditional' students, which is a term used for students going to university directly from A-levels, and 2 are 'non-traditional' students, who have re-entered further education in order to gain entry to university. The three sites were situated across southern England and can be categorised as a rural secondary comprehensive school, a city further education college and a fee-paying independent boys' school.

### Introducing Kate

Kate participated in this research from the age of 17 to 19, from her last year of A-levels to her second year of undergraduate study at university. Kate studied for her A-levels as a concord student, which means she studied between her local secondary school and a local Further Education college. Kate lived at home in the south-west of England during her A-levels and moved away to the north of England for university. Kate studied English Language, English Literature and Psychology for A-levels and obtained grades ABB, respectively. Kate is now undertaking an English Language degree. Kate said her in her first interview that she enjoyed writing and found it "**very easy**" and "**quite instinctive**", in that it was something that she "**generally just write[s] out**" and does not "**think a lot about doing**". She was the exception in the cohort of participants as she was the only

person who “love[s]” writing and regularly engaged in story writing in her leisure time during her A-levels, although she has not continued to do so at university.

The data gathered for Kate are summarised in Table 1. The analysis is largely drawn from the interview data and Kate’s written texts.

**Table 1: A summary of the data collected for Kate**

Interview data collected	Textual data collected	Contextual information relating to textual data
Interview 1 25/01/10 Face–face at FE college	Consent forms: own/parent/Facebook Literacy history questionnaire Literacy log 1 via email 13/05/10 Literacy log 2 via Facebook 11/10/10 Literacy log 3 via Facebook 09/03/11 Literacy log 4 via Facebook 21/08/11	<p><u>A level texts:</u>  <b>TEXT 1:</b> A level Psychology practice exam questions  <b>TEXT 2:</b> Draft 4/ final copy, unmarked – ‘A’ level English Literature coursework</p> <p><u>Degree level texts:</u>  <b>TEXT 3:</b> English Literature assignment – explored in interview 4  <b>TEXTS 4-6:</b> English Literature essay and notes – explored in interview 4  <b>TEXT 7:</b> English Language Skills module assessment – explored in interviews 4 &amp; 5</p>
Interview 2 26/03/10 Face–face at FE college	‘Successful’/’unsuccessful’ texts: (received in interview 2): <i>Psychology: Relationships, Aggression, Eating behaviour</i> <b>TEXT 1</b> <i>Lillijem</i> <b>TEXT 2</b> <i>Personal statement</i>	
Interview 3 13/07/10 Phone		
Interview 4 22/11/10 at university	<u>University texts: (received in interview 4):</u> <i>English Lit exam/essay</i> <b>TEXT 3</b> <i>Emily Dickinson assignment sheet with notes</i> <b>TEXT 4</b> <i>Emily Dickinson assignment – further notes</i> <b>TEXT 5</b> <i>Emily Dickinson essay (unmarked)</i> <b>TEXT 6</b> <i>What do I hope to achieve...? (with marked draft and final feedback)</i> <b>TEXT 7</b>	
Interview 5 26/04/11 Phone		
Interview 6 25/11/11 Phone		

### Analytic frames

Ivanič’s (2004) ‘discourses of writing’ framework was used as a heuristic to explore Kate’s talk about writing and her teachers’ feedback on her writing. I started by looking specifically for explicit and implicit references that evoked Ivanič’s six discourses and any other discourses of writing that emerged from the data. I will first explore Kate’s definitions of what constitutes ‘successful’ writing in the first and fourth interviews, pinpointing the different and overlapping discourse positions taken up by Kate. This will be followed by an interrogation of teachers’ commentary (or lack of it) on Kate’s writing.

In addition to the six discourses outlined above, there is repeated suggestion of an alternative discourse in Kate’s talk: *an assessment discourse of writing and learning to*

*write*. This, I would argue, is characterised by a way of talking about writing, in which writing is primarily mark/grade-driven communication. A focus on assessment is a significant theme throughout Kate’s discussions of both her A-level and university writing. Underpinning much of Kate’s talk about her writing is a constant reference to marks/grades and meeting criteria. Therefore, its addition to Ivanič’s matrix would be:

<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Layer in the comprehensive view of language</i>	<i>Beliefs about writing</i>	<i>Beliefs about learning to write</i>	<i>Approaches to the teaching of writing</i>	<i>Assessment criteria</i>
7. AN ASSESSMENT DISCOURSE	THE WRITTEN TEXT  THE WRITING EVENT	Writing consists of writing to gain the maximum amount of marks possible in a set period of time	You learn to write by doing as much exam practice as possible under exam conditions	MODELLING <i>explicit teaching</i>  RESPONDING TO MARKS RECEIVED <i>implicit teaching</i>	Correct content?  Meeting assessment objectives

**Figure 2: An Assessment discourse of writing and learning to write - an addition to Ivanič's framework (2004)**

### Kate’s shifting discourses of writing

Here I present Kate’s definitions of what constitutes ‘successful’ writing at the beginning of her final year of A-levels and explore the shifting discourse positions that she occupies:

**Sally:** When you do a piece of writing for example, what makes it feel successful, like you’ve done a really good job?

**Kate:** Cohesion - it’s got to sound right and it’s got to flow right from one paragraph to the next. You can’t have abrupt pauses or anything in it. Also, it’s got to be focused on the task that I’ve been told to do so I can’t blab off about something that’s not so relevant or talk about something that I don’t need - it’s got to be quite sharp and focused. Erm, PEEing - that’s what we’ve been taught - so Point, Evidence, Explanation. You’ve got to constantly do that in an essay.

(Extract 3, taken from interview 1 with Kate)

Kate’s definition of ‘successful’ writing signals two different discourse positions: the process discourse and the genre discourse. The process discourse is most evident in Kate’s reference to PEEing, which is the terminology used to describe a pedagogical application of the process discourse and is something that has been “**drilled**” into Kate throughout her secondary schooling. The reference about remaining focused on the task and not “blabbing off” indexes the notion of appropriacy, which Ivanič (2004) assigned as an assessment criterion of the genre discourse.

In contrast, the extract presented below is Kate’s definition of ‘successful’ writing, this time taken from her first semester of university:

**Sally:** OK last thing, uhm, what for you now, is ‘successful’ writing? Successful within your definition of success

**Kate:** uhm, uhm, uh... I guess it would be a piece of writing that uhm is grammatically correct, that uhm is written in the correct style, appropriate to an audience, uhm but meets the standards for the erm assessment criteria, when you get to like the formal side, [inaudible] whatever you're being tested on, it needs to be close ... And uhm... something that makes cohesive sense. Like actually sounds well written.

(Extract 4, taken from interview 4 with Kate)

Interestingly, we can see a shift in Kate’s opinion – from a definition in her A-levels strongly influenced by the process/ genre discourses to a definition at university that encompasses three of the other discourses but no reference to process at all. The skills discourse is indexed when she says ‘successful’ writing needs to be *grammatically correct* and make *cohesive sense*; the genre discourse when she says it needs to be *written in the correct style, appropriate to an audience*; and the assessment discourse when she says it needs to *meet the standards for the erm assessment criteria*. Significantly, the creativity discourse, indexed in her professed love of writing, is absent from both definitions, although she did choose her first piece of ‘successful’ writing based partly on her enjoyment of writing it.

This diachronic exploration of Kate’s definitions of ‘successful’ writing provides a view of the shifting assumptions and beliefs that are pertinent to her writing in terms of how she views writing, what she perceives to be valued, both personally and institutionally, and this has changed over the transition. Following this exploration, I will now interrogate the discourses indexed in the comments and feedback she received on her work.

### Kate’s teachers’ discourses of writing and learning to write: illustrations from feedback

In the final section of this case study, I will explore three examples of assessor feedback on Kate’s writing for indications of discourses of writing. The texts from which the feedback is taken, and the type of feedback, are:

- Text 1: a timed A-level Psychology practice exam – last page, including summative feedback given at the end of the document (handwritten).
- Text 3: a timed practice exam for English Literature module at university: summative feedback given at the end of the document (handwritten).
- Text 7: 2nd draft of ‘reflective’ essay for English Language Workshop module at university – summative feedback given on separate ‘coursework assignment’ sheet.



groups eat jelly beans. The group that one group was just told to eat jelly beans while the other was told information about the jelly beans. The group that was given the extra information enjoyed eating the jelly beans more and ate more of the jelly beans. This supports the detail theory because it shows that focusing on specific details makes a meal more enjoyable. This study lacks ecological validity because if you were on a diet you wouldn't eat jelly beans and you wouldn't look up information on the food either, so this study has limited use for actual diets.

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{AO1} \cdot 5 \\ \hline 4 \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} \text{AO2} \cdot 8 \\ \hline 16 \end{array}$$

$$\text{total for QVS} = \frac{13}{25}$$

$$\text{Overall total} = \frac{30}{75} = E$$

**Text extract 1: summative feedback on Text 1, a timed A-level Psychology practice exam**

The discourses invoked in these three extracts are markedly different. In text extract 1, we can see that the feedback consists of a calculation of marks, broken down according to the three questions into AO1 and AO2 (assessment objectives), with a final score and a grade. This indexes the assessment discourse; the absence of commentary or engagement with Kate's writing, consistent with the in-text assessment which consisted mostly of ticks, suggests that this particular assessor viewed Kate's answer as a formulaic composition of '(in)correct' content knowledge, rather than writing imbued with meaning-making and epistemic value. The absence of attention to the written form serves to divorce Kate as the writer, and her attendant identity, from the assessment and arguably renders her writing as nothing more than a piece of exam practice. The discourse indexed in this feedback relates to the dominant assessment discourse that was prevalent in much of Kate's talk. An interesting absence in the feedback on text 1 is the process discourse which, after being "drilled" into the students, proves difficult to assess, as Ivanič also points out (2004, p. 231).

an excellent exam paper, very well done. You make your points clearly and concisely, and the overall exam structure reads well. There are some points you made that I would have liked you to develop further, although I'm aware you had a time limit. You seem to have connected well with the texts, and made points on a number of levels, from surface word analysis to deeper relationships between implied feeling and meaning. Just be careful of making [Missing text from copy: sweeping generalisations such as the comment about readers in] Stoker's time and in your conclusion saying 'you get'. Your applications of imagery and structure in both extracts are very nicely written. A very promising start, Mel. Well done.

**Text extract 2: summative feedback on Text 3, a timed university English Literature essay**

Text extract 2 is marked in its difference to Text 1. Here we can see reference to the social practices discourse, whereby the reader/ assessor of Text 3 recognises the purpose of the writing (to communicate knowledge and interpretation of two set texts) and, critically, evaluates its “effectiveness for purpose”, as it constitutes an assessment practice that “take[s] the learner’s views into account” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 237). This feedback acknowledges Kate’s authorship and encourages her writer identity through the sandwiching of critical commentary “Just be careful of making generalisations...” between positive appraisals of Kate’s efforts.

This should potential... You've made some good observations regarding your thoughts and insights, and learning English. However, I felt that some <sup>sections</sup> ~~areas~~ were underdeveloped and didn't explicitly answer the question. I'd also like you to pay attention to the Structure of the piece, as in parts it seems mismatched. The presentation of your work is good & you writing flows cohesively and is punctuated appropriately.

① Introduce the topic/define terms/explain the topic's relevance to the question  
 ② Answer the question  
 ③ Structure  
 ④ Relate this to the question, to what you hope to achieve.  
 ⑤ Consider how this follows on  
 ⑥ The text suggests success based on the info you give it. You need to think about which skills/personal attributes underlie the success. 53%  
 You could like to go into... and then reassess which skills you need to develop.

**Text extract 3: summative feedback for Text 7, written on a ‘coursework assignment’ sheet attached to the completed and marked assignment**

In contrast, text extract 3 gives flavours of several discourses of writing. Similar to text extract 2, the assessor of Text 7 indexes the social practices discourse in recognising the effectiveness of Kate's writing and in the list of improvements, which correspond to specific instances in-text, with the question "7) what could you do about this?". The skills and process discourses are signalled in the comments "...your writing flows cohesively and is punctuated appropriately" and "structure". The overall grade given indexes the skills, genre and assessment discourses as the allocation of percentage mark connotes accuracy, appropriacy and correctness of content.

## Conclusion

An important implication from the exploratory analysis reported in this paper, is the possibility of empirically exploring the transition that students undertake, in terms of the different discourse positions inhabited across the transitional period using Ivanič's (2004) framework as a starting point. By using students' definitions of what they perceive to be 'successful' writing collected from different points throughout the data collection period, it is possible to explore how the students' views of writing shift, merge and compete.

In using Ivanič's (2004) framework of discourses of writing and learning to write as a heuristic, it is possible to explore the conflicting and hybrid discourses indexed by Kate's talk and the comments of her teachers/ lecturers. These in turn suggest different, sometimes competing, ways of conceptualising writing and assumptions about writing. By exploring Kate's definitions of 'successful' writing, it is possible to draw on her shifting beliefs about writing and how she evaluates her writing. Furthermore, in exploring the feedback received on Kate's writing, it is useful to see how her teachers' discourses of writing, indexed in their feedback comments, correspond with Kate's definitions of what constitutes 'successful' writing. The association suggests that Kate's discourses are strongly influenced by those of her teachers, indicating that her teachers assert some control over the discourse positions made available to Kate, both explicitly, for example in the form of PEEing, and implicitly in the discursive practice used when evaluating Kate's work. In addition, the emergence of an assessment discourse could be seen as significant because it can foreground the restrictive power inherent in the regime of A-level assessment, its associated pedagogical practices and its potential impact on students when they move to university writing.

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