**Post/graduate Writing Pedagogies and Research Literacies in the 21stCentury.**

**Exploring Postgraduate Academic Writing Practices and Identities.**

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**Abstract**

**This chapter explores how in my postgraduate qualitative research into academic writing I sought to challenge and resist dominant discourses used in the academy to validate and legitimate academic post-graduate writing practices using an alternative post-qualitative approach to research. This post-qualitative approach draws on the ‘posts’ (St. Pierre, 2013); that is, post-structuralism, postmodernism, post-colonialism, post-feminism, post-revolutionary, post-emancipatory forms of enquiry. Using this approach helped me to speak in new ways about my research identity and focus, as well as critiquing my own doctoral academic writing practices.**

**Aspects of my academic writing and postgraduate research practices are discussed throughout the chapter to illustrate how a post-qualitative approach can work in pedagogic and research literacy terms. For example, I use autoethnography that highlights the tensions inherent in the relationship between my subjectivity as a researcher, and my participants’ researched subjectivities (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In addition, my treatment of participant accounts offers some insights into alternative conceptualisations of postgraduate academic writing practices that the research threw up. CHECK OUT CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH**

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**Conceptual framework: Researching Academic Writing Practices in Higher Education**

In his book *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* (1999) Gee posits that social domains, like higher education settings can never be known directly, rather they are always constructed, or given meaning, through language. This conceptualisation of how one experiences the world was part of what Gee (1996) in an earlier work termed the ‘social turn’, a shift, he argues, that influenced all social sciences in the latter half of the twentieth century by challenging old certainties and hierarchies. Informed by the ‘social turn’ this chapter considers how dominant academic writing practices, especially doctoral writing in education and the social sciences generally, are reproduced within the social domain of higher education. The research that informs it is specifically into writing is concerned primarily with how post-graduate writers come to recognise, or are inducted into specific forms of what I have termed disciplinary-congruent forms of academic writing in higher education settings.

Between dominant discourses there always exist alternative, liminal spaces through which other meanings form and move, that are neither visible nor understood and as I began to deconstruct the dominant postgraduate discourses that I was working with I found myself moving between some slippery, liminal spaces concerning identity, power, epistemology and pedagogy. What has emerged out of these spaces is not an evidence-based qualitative research project on what it means to be a postgraduate writer, but something that more resembles a conversation between the extant literature on the subject, the research participants and myself about our lived experiences of postgraduate academic writing and practices in higher education.

**Critiquing Traditional Models of Academic Writing in Higher Education**

The work of early linguists like Bloomfield (1933) treated formal writing as a decontextualised set of skills. This skills model, which Street (much later in 1984) termed ‘autonomous’, represented spelling, punctuation and grammar as a ‘neutral technology’ which once acquired could be applied by individuals universally without reference to any ideological and cultural values. Defined through autonomous, skills-based models ‘good academic writing’ is often characterised by the idea that effective academic writers are able to select and then uniquely combine words from an internalised (disciplinary-based) lexicon in order to express their subject-specific learning clearly and effectively.

Across all educational sectors autonomous models of literacy operate as a dominant discourse informing academic writing and writing development practices. In a higher education environment these dominant academic writing practices can be seen to function to regulate and differentiate standards and students. This is because judgments about students’ writing, at whatever level (undergraduate or postgraduate) are:

…centered on individual and individual differences [which are] …realised within a set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic and normative practices (Hoskin, 1990, p.52)

In higher education, the examination and surveillance of teaching and learning standards are often mediated through particular academic writing practices. This is because written assignments of one form or another, remain a common (although not the only, and not always the most important) vehicle for mediating learning across most disciplines. Academic writing summative assignments certainly continue to be the most conventional means by which humanities and social science students are assessed and ranked. Through these means academic writing exerts what Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* (1979) terms ‘disciplinary power’ which is perpetuated through observance of standards in higher education maintained through a pervasive ‘apparatus of uninterrupted examination’ (Foucault, 1981, p.186). Moreover, Street (2000) argues that this discursive form of power aided by autonomous models of writing:

…disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin [writing, so they] can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal (p.18).

The production and examination of summative written assignments therefore may *appear* to individuate learners by reifying and rendering their learning visible so that it can be judged on its own terms or objectively according to agreed academic ‘standards’. However, one can argue that agreed academic standards around what constitutes ‘good academic writing’ may maintain their dominance because they create:

…certain sorts of meaningful connections in our experience, and privilege certain symbols systems and ways of knowing over others. (Gee, 1996, p.13)

rather than because they actually represent the ‘best’ way of writing for academic purposes. Foucault in a number of his early key texts (1982, 1984) outlined how power relations create those ‘meaningful connections’ which then solidify over time into ‘objects’ of knowledge and domination. In this way privileged systems and ways of writing can, over time, begin to function as ‘Big D’ discourses (Gee, 1996) which, although they may be experienced by lecturers and students alike as ‘common-sense’, are actually constructions, maintained by discursive and disciplinary power relations, rather than self-evident universal standards that can be unproblematically applied to individuals’ academic writing practices.

Challenging dominant autonomous models of academic writing in higher education requires that one view them as part of :

…of a domain… framed by its culture. Their meaning and purpose are socially constructed through negotiations among present and past members. [Such] activities thus cohere in a way that is, in theory, if not always in practice, accessible to members who move within the social framework. These coherent, meaningful, and purposeful activities are….most simply defined as the ordinary practices of the culture. (Seely-Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989, p.1).

This notion of cultural domains and practices reinforces the idea, originally formulated in Berger & Luckmann (1966), that the apparent stability and ‘givenness’ of dominant discourses and the institutions and the social realities that they support are not ‘real’ or ‘true’ in any concrete sense. Hence I argue in my research that academic writing practices, no matter how apparently ‘common-sense’ they may appear, are complex and contestable because they are actually constructed out of multiple, sedimented ‘semantic layers’ which have accrued over time (Bakhtin, 1981, p.276). Moreover, postgraduate writers negotiate these ‘semantic layers’ as ‘nomadic’ subjects who are ‘ambivalent and polyvalent’ (Lather, 2006, p.43) about the writing practices and artefacts that they constantly encounter on their doctoral research journey.

My doctoral research journey saw me move from pre-thesis ‘common-sense’ conceptualisations of academic writing towards the alternative, re-conceptualisations of academic writing practices as I have outlined in Figure 1 below.

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| **Pre-thesis ‘common-sense’ conceptualisations of academic writing**  | **Problematised reconceptualisation of academic writing emerging out of the PhD research** |
| Autonomous  | Ideological  |
| Objective | Subjective  |
| Techniscist skills set  | Social practice  |
| Universal  | Situated |
| Functional  | Creative  |
| Performative  | Developmental  |
| Fixed  | Fluid |

**Figure 1 Pre and post-thesis conceptualisations of academic writing**

The problematised reconceptualisations suggested that academic writing practices are very complicated and can be viewed (and are often experienced) in ways that challenge and critique the dominant perceptions extant in the Academy about writing. I realised that in order to explore fully these problematised reconceptualisations doctoral academic writing practices, I needed first to deconstruct my own perceptions about academic writing, not least because I am constructed and constrained by the very academic writing discourses I am researching and critiquing as a doctoral student writing about academic writing practices. Indeed, I became convinced as part of the process of my doctoral research that postgraduates, including myself, often find ourselves struggling with what Lillis and Turner (2001) call the “institutional practice of mystery” surrounding academic writing practices in higher education (p.53).

In my thesis I begin to interrogate those ‘mysteries’ by asking questions such as, where do established conceptions of post-graduate academic writing in higher education come from? Were they susceptible to change? Could they be challenged? Do we actually have a clear idea what doctoral academic writing is? And finally, how do I and my fellow postgraduates negotiate and re-negotiate their/my/our personal relationships with those academic writing practices in our own writing (both doctorally and post-doctorally). Moreover, I treated doctoral academic writing practices as phenomena that can be re-constructed and re-interpreted using a post-qualitative methodology (which I discuss next) that potentially disrupt, defamiliarise and problematise dominant theories and concepts around qualitative research.

**Methodology**

**Towards a post-qualitative research approach for academic writing practices**

Out of the reconceptualisations of academic writing practices that I had developed ( In Figure 1) came a growing conviction that traditional methodologies of educational qualitative research could not accommodate the actual messiness that characterises the lived experience of doctoral academic writing practices in higher education. To meet these new demands I reconceptualised a set of qualitative educational research approaches that I used to characterise my research into the reconceptualised academic writing practices outlined in Figure 1 above.

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| **Reconceptualisations of qualitative educational research** |
| Linear ………………………………………………………………………………………………….Rhizomic |
| Creating impact……………………………………………………………………………………Influential |
| Outcome focussed ………………………………………………………………………………Process based |
| Objectivity…………………………………………………………………………………………...Subjectivities |
| Validity…………………………………………………………………………………………………Relational |
|  Conclusive …………………………………………………………………….......................Open-ended/inconclusive |
| Individual…………………………………………………………………………………………… Collaborative |
| External……………………………………………………………………………………………….Embedded |
| Solution-based……………………………………………………………………………………..Problem-based |

Figure 2 Reconceptualisations of qualitative educational research

These reconceptualisation resulted in the adoption of a broadly post-qualitative research methodology in place of a more traditional qualitative research approach. Like St. Pierre (2011),

My critique is not that [traditional] qualitative inquiry is unscientific, my critique is that, to a great extent, it has been so disciplined, so normalized, so centered…that is has become conventional, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive and has lost its radical possibilities to produce knowledge differently. (p. 613).

The application of a post-qualitative paradigm in educational research is powerful because it holds any object/subject of inquiry as ontologically complex because it must always be viewed as part of wider contexts and processes that are culturally inscribed and historically situated.

Post-qualitative’s radicalism as a methodological approach lies in the idea that research is always ‘made’, it can therefore deliberately resist being made in particular ways; however natural or common-sense they may appear. Indeed, Clough (1992) argues that all research approaches, including post-qualitative and quantitative, can therefore be treated as socially situated, constructed forms of discourse. Moreover, if all research approaches are constructed then it follows that they can be systematically deconstructed, ‘as one practice among others’ (Foucault, 1972 p. 186). For this reason each doctoral thesis can be regarded as a highly subjective and stylised act of ‘textual staging’ which constantly draws attention to how the researcher/writer is creating one particular kind of (usually disciplinary-congruent) research narrative (rather than any other that might be available to them).

**Questions of identity**

Research always constructs an identity for the ‘researcher’; indeed Foucault saw research as an important ‘practice of the self’ (1972). For this reason the question of the postmodern researcher’s subjectivity, is as important as the subjectivities of the research participants, as they and the researcher are all engaged in producing narrative texts and identities that

 …produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently.

 (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 175

as part of the research process.

In my doctoral thesis I was deliberately conscious and reflexive about my emotional, subjective and personal experience of academic writing as I am emotionally and personally involved in the practices and people who are the subjects of my research. As a lecturer working in the research domain, I shared many of the academic writing and writing development practices and experiences of my research participants and I am simultaneously present, positioned and constructed in my research as an employee, colleague, academic, educator, students, researcher and research participant.

The complexity of research subjectivities makes the relationship between researchers and their participants convoluted and messy, as it is not easy to tease out the many subject positions available in the research process. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) regard even primary identities such as ‘researcher’ or 'participant’ as emergent and transient; held artificially, as in aspic, for the purposes of the research narrative alone. Critically evaluating their relations with participants within the research domain is also an essential part the role of a reflexive post-qualitative researcher like myself. This is because, as Gubrium and Holstein (2003) contend, participants cannot help but be affected by the biases, subject positions, and possibly disciplinary concerns of the researcher.

**Repositioning the value of qualitative data through a post-qualitative approach to subjectivity**

Traditionally educational qualitative researchers do a number of things with subjectivity; they objectivise their ‘speaking subjects’, differentiate them or categorise them, either way they turn them into research subjects. Questioning the ways in which subjectivity and subjectivities inform traditional qualitative data analysis are key post-qualitative methodological concerns as they destabilise traditional concepts of validity in educational qualitative research projects. Kincheloe, (2005) for example argues that post-qualitative researchers should,

…seek multiple perspectives not to provide the truth about reality but to avoid the monological knowledge that emerges from unquestioned frames of reference and the dismissal of the numerous relationships and connections that link various forms of knowledge (p.327)

By taking a multiple perspective approach post-qualitative researchers do not seek to conjure any ultimate coherence, authenticity or truth out of the various subjectivities and inter-subjectivities elicited from research participants, nor are any participant’s individual perceptions deemed more representative or accurate than another. Rather, post-qualitative research data is regarded as inherently unstable and always full of potential meanings or interpretations, depending on who is reading or interpreting it and when and where. This lack of determinism raises many questions about the nature of qualitative data as they are questions without a single definitive answer or endpoint as Figure 3 demonstrates.

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| ***Epistemological uncertainty about subjectivity and ‘knowing’**** *What do I/my participants know/think we know…about anything…ever?*
* *When can if tell if participants are pretending/lying/deluded/acting out, and does it matter if they are?*
* *Do we know or feel the same about stuff today as we did yesterday as we will tomorrow/ and the next day and the next day…?*
* *How do we remember what we knew or thought we felt yesterday, last week, a year ago…( and so on)*
* *How do I shape/interpret/construct/deconstruct/represent what I people tell me about what they say they know or feel?*
* *What did I /miss/ignore/misinterpret/misunderstand/leave out…and why did I do that?*

*(and so on…)*  |

Figure 3 Post-qualitative epistemological uncertainty about subjectivity and knowing.

Post-qualitative research is therefore less about problem-solving and more about problem-making through narrative accounts. By problematising the ‘subjectiveness’ of qualitative analysis, a post-qualitative approach opens up a critical commentary informing social phenomena, like academic writing practices in higher education, rather than simply shaping and serving them up as the findings of a postgraduate thesis.

In their *Handbook of Narratology* Huhn et al. (2009) chart how in methodological terms research participant accounts can be treated as linguistically constructed and discursively positioned, rather ‘true’ or ‘real’. They discuss how influential theorists/researchers like Plummer (1993) and Rosenthal (2008) insisted that narrative be treated as no more than an individual’s subjective interpretation of events during their lives. Kincheloe (2001, 2005) moreover, describes how the subjectivities of research participants and researchers constitute a form of, ‘narrative bricolage’ which,

…appreciates the notion that all research knowledge is shaped …by the types of stories inquirers tell about their topics. Such story types are not innocently constructed but reflect particular narratological traditions…, and irony. The bricoleur’s [researcher’s] knowledge of the frequently unconscious narrative formula at work in the representation of the research allows a greater degree of insight into the forces that shape the nature of knowledge production. Thus, more complex and sophisticated research emerges from the bricolage. (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 337)

Mattingly (1991) also discusses how the human motivation for telling stories about themselves serves to ‘wrest meaning from experiences’, whilst Polkinghorne (1995) views narratives of the self as the most important way that individuals make meaning out of their experiences because narratives,

… exhibit human activity as purposeful engagement in the world. Narrative is the type of discourse that draws together diverse events, happenings and actions of human lives (p.5).

Although participants’ responses in my study were elicited to discover their personal perceptions of doctoral academic writing practices, their accounts were very ‘sticky’ as they reflected wider epistemological and political discourses in higher education. Although they were individual narratives they were inevitably informed and emerged out of wider dominant socio-cultural and institutional discourses that my participants were part of.

**Analysis of the data**

**Post-qualitative data analysis**

The analysis of data in the thesis was specifically concerned with how the participants’, and my own, perceptions of post-graduate doctoral academic writing practices reflect and/or resist ‘ regimes of truth’ within which dominant academic writing practices are carried out as part of the everyday business of higher education. The resulting analysis was not just constructed by me the researcher; it simultaneously constructed me as ‘the researcher’, another participant in the thesis engaged in those accounts of doctoral academic writing practices I was analysing. I used the reconceptualisations of academic writing outlined in Figure 1 above to illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of participants’ subjective narratives about their academic writing experiences in the research setting. My analysis of the data also explored how those narratives often pointed towards hegemonic unconscious structures of thought which reflect dominant discourses around academic writing practices, rather than trying to establish if there is any ‘real’ meaning or ‘truth’ to their individual utterances.

There was no intention to produce though this analysis a naturalised, overarching research narrative that explained what the participants’ responses meant. Consequently, no truths were uncovered, the research subjects were not liberated, and accounts of practice were not used to model ideal notions of ‘good practice’ around doctoral academic writing practices. Lastly, the extracts used from participants’ accounts in the thesis write up were treated throughout as unstable and representative only of themselves.

**Post-graduate Writing Experiences – Stepping up**

For some participants’ their ongoing struggles with academic writing practices started all over again when they embarked on a doctorate as it represented a sharp academic writing transition. Participants often felt that their previous experiences of and successes in academic writing (as undergraduates and even at MA level) often counted for little once they embarked on writing at doctoral level.

*By the time I got to PG levels (MA) I thought I had cracked it only to find at doctoral level I had not! (*Susan)

*Well the first thing that comes to mind when thinking about writing for my Ed Doc is the assignments coming up and that it was really informative to engage in the whole thing of ‘am I getting the level right? (*Helen)

*I don’t think I have got anywhere yet, I did well at university and have done the assignments and that was all fine and then didn’t do it for decades and you come back for the Ed Doc and it’s like aaarrrghhh!! (*Martha*)*

Participants often commented that they felt each new qualification required a move into a different writing space from the one previously inhabited, this was nowhere more apparent than that change from Masters to doctoral level.

*At PhD level the type of academic writing required is a large step-up from even Masters Level. (Gill*)

This ‘step up’ is often synonymous with the idea that doctorates are perceived as the most elite and possibly esoteric or rarefied form of academic writing. The academic writing practices involved in doctoral writing were certainly experienced by participants as a very distinct community of practice into which they were, sometimes painfully, inducted.

*For even baby academics like me, it’s part of your whole grounding as an academic writer that you become sceptical and it’s that scepticism and being able to both justify a position and a state of uncertainty that is so difficult to grasp, because perhaps you’ve read three different things and you don’t agree with any of them so you’re in a state of uncertainty but that might still be a valid state to be in but you then have to route it through your writing towards some kind of position, you do in the end have to make a decision about what you think* a*nd how you are going to write about it*. (Helen)

*…you go into an Ed Doc or a PhD and suddenly it’s not just enough to read and understand something and it’s not just enough to be able to kind of enumerate that knowledge back into a conversation, you’ve got to do all that but then you’ve got to go the extra mile and got to hit the ground running and go deeper and write at a more conceptual level (Miriam))*

*Before starting postgraduate studies it [my academic writing] was a bit ‘immature’. I was very aware that my writing needed to get to another level if I was going to succeed at this new level. (Valerie)*

Often the stepping up manifested itself as a specific awareness by participants of the need to address and comply not only with disciplinary-based theory at this level, but with new, specifically post-graduate academic writing practices. This understanding was often gained at some personal cost, especially if there had been a length of time between undergraduate and post-graduate study.

*Having to write academically again was a shock to the system initially. (*Helen*)*

Participants often suggested that writing at postgraduate level brought them a heightened awareness of disciplinary-based field boundaries and her possible place within them. Writing doctorally therefore was not just about articulating/reproducing dominant knowledge discourses in the field, increasingly they required individuals to overtly position themselves, ontologically, using a critical rationale, (overtly or implicitly) in relation to dominant discourses (consciously or unconsciously). Importantly for my research focus these ontological and epistemological considerations required more nuanced academic writing practices than had previously been the case.

For participants, the stakes around embarking on and completing doctoral theses were clearly very high. The achievement of a PhD or Ed Doc qualification is mediated, especially in the humanities and social sciences, though the production and defence of a written doctoral text. Doctoral texts can therefore be seen to operate as a schematic metonym within the domain of higher education legitimising individuals’ status and identity simultaneously as professional academic writers and academics.

*The thesis is my academic flag sent out in the world – I am more than it and yet in terms of an academic identity it does/it will brand me – I feel judged and want to be accorded the value that it accrues by participating in the production of such a prestigious product of the professional world I am engaged in*. (Miriam)

One can argue that the perceived academic writing credentials of the doctoral supervisory team are a vital aspect of their authority. They are the people perceived to have the knowledge and expertise to get their supervisees through the doctorate.

*I would say my tutors at the Institute of Education who are both well-known authors in Early Years have been a big influence, their encouragement and insights into the effort they put into their work has been helpful.* (Ian)

However, as ‘experts’ in their field, supervisors could also be perceived as quite intimidating by their supervisees.

*Although I have now started my PhD I still feel very much a novice and still in awe of my supervisors.* (Gail)

Although, Directors of Study (DOS) and supervisory teams are ostensibly appointed for their subject expertise, it has been argued that through their comments on the *presentation of knowledge*, that they, albeit somewhat elliptically, exert degrees of the disciplinary power, discussed above, over supervisees’ doctoral writing practices (Kiley & Mullins, 2002). This is due, in part, to the intimate, more private doctoral relationship that often means that supervisors are the only audience for a thesis during its gestation.

*My DOS was hugely important as she gave me* *the confidence to think I could do it. (*Lesley*)*

Certainly, supervisors and their students often work together closely within a professional environment where dominant disciplinary and writing discourses intersect, inscribe and determine particular paradigms or communities of practice. As Johnson, Lee & Green, 2010) write, doctorates:

…are required by formal legislation to be subject to `supervision’, which means that both the student (the `candidate’) and the dissertation are to be constructed under the authorised and authorising gaze of an already-established researcher, standing in, in some sense, for the field of study in question and for the Academy more generally (p.142) .

One might expect therefore to find that a majority of participants cited their doctoral supervisory teams as the most significant influence on their development of a field-congruent, post-graduate academic writing style. This influence was experienced positively by some participants:

*The biggest influence on my writing at doctoral level was my PhD supervisor… He helped me to learn to cut through the waffle and just say what I mean.* (Rose)

*I would have to say my supervisory team for my PhD have had the most influence on my writing recently, as they have spent some considerable time with me and continuously checked and advised me on my writing ability.* (Siobhan)

*My DOS have really guided me carefully through the whole process of writing the Ed Doc, it has been trial and error all the way, with me making the mistakes and then helping me sort them out.* (Helen)

and negatively by others:

*I felt I was just expected to learn how to write at doctoral level. I sort of worked it out as I went along but I know that I could have done with more support as I often got things wrong. We got plenty of input about methodology and literature reviews but that is not the same as working out how to write them up. We never got anything about that...*  (Lesley)

*Initially my doctoral supervisors were very critical about my writing, it was not the right level, it was not academic enough, it was too subjective, looking back I can see what they mean but at the time I struggled to produce what they wanted*. (Miriam)

Studies of PhD supervision relationships have often focused on close-grained transmission pedagogies that foster master and novice relationships (such as the iterative cycle of producing writing, which is read by the supervisor, then discussed with the candidate then rewritten and further discussed …and so on). This cycle allows the supervisors to not only monitor the content of a thesis, but to reify ‘appropriate’ doctoral writing practices (Johnson et al, 2000).

*As a PhD student I felt bound by convention and by structure and I had real difficulty with finding the right style for my doctoral writing …this as unfortunate as it was something which my DOS was very particular about. (Bob)*

Frow (1988) reflects how, through this kind of unequal relationship, the doctoral process assigns:

… a structural role to insecurity [as it]…challenges the candidate’s sense of worth (p.319)

This sense of insecurity was referred to by a number of the participants:

*I am always trying to impress my Director of Studies*. (Susan)

*I think that the process of writing my thesis has made me less confident as a writer as I worry constantly about achieving the required level (Martha)*

 My thesis concluded that academic writing at doctoral level creates just another, albeit prestigious, writing ‘self’ or identity, which is part of a long line of writing identities assumed by professionals working in academia. This reflects Butler’s (1995) notion of multiple, plastic notion of identities. For example, one participants sought to get published they found themselves taking on, or at least considering, other new, equally challenging post-doctoral writing identities.

Far from being an exercise in Enlightenment-informed autonomy and originality therefore, the doctoral thesis as a literacy product or artefact is often experienced as the final capitulation to dominant academic writing discourses characterising the wider disciplinary field. Not least, because candidates are often carefully steered towards presenting doctoral work through very traditional and uniform academic writing practices by their supervisory teams.

*…with the PhD you are terrified of writing in those areas like an experimental or creative way. Writing a doctorate can be a very conservative experience, mine certainly was.* (Bob*)*

*…my experience with the Ed D assignments not just doing all the reading but is one of having to write what the tutors want…in the way they want you to write it. Needless to say I worry constantly about getting it wrong! (*Martha*)*

However, despite the pressure to conform, doctorates were cited by participants as ‘evidence’ that they had proved that they could generate academic writing that sat comfortably within a wider professional identity.

*Largely as a result of writing my PhD thesis over the last five years, my skills as a writer have developed considerably. Not only does the process of academic writing come more naturally to me now but I also feel much more confident in the way in which I am able to express my thoughts/ideas through the written medium*. (Tim)

For Tim and other participants in the study producing a doctorate seemed to involve a process of internalising and naturalising a discipline’s dominant academic writing practices.

*Since I started writing for my dissertation it [academic writing] became second nature.* (Luis)

Luis intimates that the academic writing practices he developed or was inducted into via the doctoral process now feel ‘natural’ (although of course one can argue that they are as ideological as any other form of writing).

The doctorate also signalled (at least to other professionals in the field) an important professional milestone, namely the final formal confirmation that, as one participant put it, ‘*I had arrived*’. At the end of a successful doctoral process the candidate is reborn as:

…an intelligible academic identity… a licensed scholar, a `doctor’, who, appropriately credentialled, is deemed safe to pursue research unsupervised, autonomously. (Johnson, Lee & Green, 2010, p.136)

**New approaches to postgraduate writing practices and writing identities**

This chapter has discussed how many of the expectations and assumptions around doctoral academic writing practices remain implicit. It has offered a research approach that offers a way of exploring the often messy lived experience of postgraduate writing practices.

 It argues that the development of positive and potentially transformative doctoral academic writing experiences rely on doctoral students and their supervisors being more overtly engaged in exploring and challenging taken for granted, dominant assumptions about academic writing and writing development practices at postgraduate level and how they inform and shape research processes (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001).

Re-imagining postgraduate writing and writing development practices requires the creation of a dynamic and exciting cross-disciplinary approach to postgraduate writing. In particular, there is a need to encourage postgraduates and their supervisors to be more adventurous and innovative in their work, to produce work with more awareness of the how epistemologies and methodologies act upon legitimacy and validity claims, power relations and postgraduate writing identities.

Critical pedagogies of postgraduate academic, like the one offered in this chapter, enact critical forms of academic identity-work that embody distinct, often conflicting and contradictory, writing identities. Some of the writing selves encountered along my doctoral research journey have been discarded, such as my unquestioning qualitative research self. Others I have come to love. I am especially fond of my post-qualitative research self. I accept, moreover, that the ‘doctoral self’ resulting from the successful completion and examination of my thesis is, of course, as constructed as any other writing identity I might care to assume or construct in the future. (I have for example a reasonably active creative writing self). It is perhaps worth noting that the writing selves nurtured and evolved through the completion of my doctoral thesis are not what I, or anyone else, could have expected. They do not constitute any kind of finished product; instead they create possibilities for further self-invention and experimentation in institutional discourses and practices around academic writing practices. Like some of the participants stated, I am looking forward to the freedoms that post-doctoral writing opportunities offer.

In this way all my writing selves can be viewed as constructions or fabulations (Foucault, 1980). It may therefore be more productive to see one’s doctoral self as just as another version, the next (conflicted/provisional) self one may become or inhabit in as one lives live out one’s writing life. On a more prosaic, professional level I also recognise, like some of my participants, that successfully completing a doctorate is recognised as a necessary, outward facing step or gesture towards a legitimised professional ‘academic’ identity (even if one internally remains riven with doubts and anxieties about all those key features of academic writing that were identified by the participants in this research, namely: clarity; purposefulness; audience; status; and originality). In this sense the title ‘Dr’ is just another identity that can be invoked in the Academy alongside other available higher education identities such as ‘manager’ or ‘lecturer’.

As a commodified academic writing product therefore, I view doctoral theses as one of the principal means by which the academy generates and polices new professional identities, in addition to its more established (yet very problematic) role as a vehicle for facilitating and policing the production of ‘new’ knowledge. As such, doctorates stand as a ‘unique selling point’ (USP) for higher education professionals in that successfully completing a doctorate can be a game changer in the personal/professional identity stakes. Indeed I would go so far to say that continuing to develop new academic writing practices is essential to the development of any successful post-doctoral professional writing identity.

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