**Academic writing as identity-work in higher education: Forming a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’:** Dr Amanda French Reader in Teaching and Learning, Birmingham City University UK

**Introduction**

In positioning academic writing as a form of professional identity-work in higher education this paper deploys a broadly postmodern conceptualisation of identity(ies) which reflects Butler’s (1990) key idea that ‘…identity is a signifying practice’ (p.145). It contends moreover, that individual academics are constantly engaged in the construction and presentation of professional ‘selves’ and identities through the production of academic writing Drawing on Bourdieu, I am going to characterise professional identity-work for academics as a:

[…] struggle to determine the conditions and the criteria of legitimate membership and legitimate hierarchy, that is, to determine which properties are pertinent, effective and liable to function as capital so as to generate the specific profits guaranteed by the field […] (2001, p.11)

I will be arguing that professional academic writing functions as a key ‘property’ determining the conditions and criteria of legitimate membership for academics in the ‘field’ of higher education.

I will also be considering the variations that exist between higher education institutions, which are further divided along disciplinary lines, specialisms and sub-specialisms (and the various Schools and Faculties within each university). Across these various lines of travel, I will be arguing that academics’ professional identities are inevitably and constantly:

[…] enacted and constructed…coalesce[d]…shaped and re-shaped. (Trowler and Knight, 2004, p.30).

I will also explore, through my construction of a ‘professional academic writing in higher education habitus’ how academics’ professional, work-based writing identities can also be understood as part of a wider ‘lived complexity’ (Sucharhov, 1994), which cannot be separated from their other personal, social and cultural identities through membership of other communities which change as their careers progress (Archer, 2008). Nor can one ignore how individual academic identities further intersect with class, ethnicity and gender affiliations Indeed, Clegg (2008) describes how academics’ highly differentiated academic writing identities are:

[…] not a fixed property [they are] part of the lived complexity of a person’s project and their ways of being in those sites which are constituted as being part of the academic environment […] (p.329

In addition, individual academics’ roles and responsibilities may change substantially over time resulting in ‘shape-shifting portfolio’ professionals (Gee, 1999b) who develop ‘boundaryless careers’ (Dowd and Kaplan, 2005). All of which means that far from being a smooth, progressive trajectory towards a fixed professional status, professional academic identities are perhaps best understood as part of a constant process of professional ‘becoming’ and/or ‘unbecoming’. Using these terms Colley and James’ (2005) illustrate the extent to which individuals in the Academy experience the process of developing an academic identity as a ‘disrupted’ process, characterised by ontological uncertainty and feelings of inauthenticity. Similarly, Leathwood (2005) in her study of female further education lecturers, describes professional identities as ‘fluid, shifting and constructed through difference and exclusions’ (p.391). So that:

[…] the meanings associated with ‘being’ an academic and what constitutes ‘academic work’ are always in process. (Archer, 2008, p.385)

Within all this complexity, as I discuss in the next section, dominant higher education writing conventions and the communities of practice that they support, frame and inform academics’ individual experiences of academic writing and their induction into and construction of legitimated professional writing identities.

**In what ways does academic writing inform professional identities and capital in higher education?**

(1). This paper contends that there is an important, if often unrecognised link, between academic writing and professional identity and capital in higher education. This is because academic writing is one of the principle means by which academics enact professional capital as experts and specialists in their disciplinary fields. I also consider the extent to which professional writing identities are nested inside various sectoral, disciplinary and institutional Bourdieusian fields, creating what I have called a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ which both informs and performs their professional capital. However, I also acknowledge that professional academic writing, as an elevated form of ‘writtenness’ (Turner, 2018) appears much more stable than it actually is. This is because the operation of higher education linguistic capital can be usefully defined, like any form of capital, as a:

[…] configuration of positions comprising agents (individuals, groups of actors or institutions) struggling to maximize their position […] (Maton, 2008, p.698)

An examination of the functions of professional academic writing in higher education can usefully involve, therefore, an exploration of how they underpin ‘the configuration of positions’ on offer to academics in their professional lives. For this reason, my examination of academic writing identities is less about personal or professional writing preferences or choices and more about the different subject positions that are available for individuals to take up within higher education’s dominant institutional discourses and disciplinary communities of academic writing practices (Kendall and Wickham, 1999, p.54). (1) To this end, I extend Reay’s (2004) idea of an ‘operationalised habitus’ to specifically explore how, over time, disciplinary-congruent academic writing practices in higher education accrete and shape academics’ professional writing identities in various and complicating ways.

Academics are ‘worker(s) in the knowledge economy’ (Ball, 2013, p.120) and their academic ‘knowledges’ are largely presented for wider consumption through professional academic writing practices and the resultant artefacts of their trade. Even the act of speaking as an academic is bolstered, either explicitly, by reference to written notes at the point of speaking, or implicitly through the status conferred on extempore utterances which are subsequently legitimated through a body of written, published work. The context of this research is therefore, in many ways, mundane because it concerns itself with academic writing practices, which constitute, along with academic reading, much of the core, day-to-day work of professional academics in higher education. It also important to acknowledge that professional academic writing is also central to academics’ relationship to the Research Evaluation Framework (REF), as many of them are under great pressure to get published by the very competitive, heirarchised academic publishing industry.

Higher education is, therefore, saturated in academic writing practices which facilitate the core business of higher education, that is, processes of academic knowledge production and exchange. Academics are expected to endlessly read, analyse, assess and compare written texts, such as reports, academic papers and books, undergraduate assignments, postgraduate dissertations and doctorates. They also produce written teaching materials and textbooks for student consumption along with research reports, monographs, articles and textbooks for publication. This perpetual production and consumption of texts, along with an adherence to systematic protocols around peer-review and observance of conventions governing the use of quotations, citations and bibliographies are all clear manifestations of the ways in which higher education academic writing practices are constantly re-inscripted through an inexhaustible exchange of knowledges mediated via constant interactions between academics with academic writing artefacts of one kind or another.

Discourses informing academic writing and the practices that emerge out of them are treated throughout this paper as a productive, rhizomic muddle, mess or ‘entanglement’ (Barad, 2007), in which academics, as groups and individuals, are enmeshed in myriad ways. Material things and processes involved in academic writing in higher education, such as written texts, and writing practices, are also constantly inter and intra-acting with academics as part of their everyday working lives. It is through this rhizomic muddle, mess and the resultant entanglements that academics’ professional identities are formed/informed, amongst other aspects of their working lives, by what I am calling a ‘professional higher education writing habitus’. (2). My identification of this ‘professional higher education writing habitus’ arose initially out of primary research conducted as part of my doctoral thesis. In brief, I carried out a small qualitative survey with self-selecting teaching staff (32) in one Education Faculty in a post-1992 university who responded to an open online elicitation to discuss their academic writing experiences since their time as undergraduates.

**The status of higher education academic writing**

Through higher education academic writing practices academics ‘distribute, transmit and evaluate’ their educational knowledge within distinct social power relations, so that:

[…] to a greater or lesser extent they, [academic writing practices] are involved in educating people [academics and those outside of academia] about the sociolinguistic order they live in. (Fairclough, 1995 p.220).

(3). To understand the extent to which academics’ professional identity and capital are informed by the ‘sociolinguistic order’ of their academic writing within the Academy I invoke Bourdieu’s (1984) idea that one of higher education’s most important social regulatory functions is to reproduce cultural and economic power. Specifically, Bourdieu argued that higher education achieved this through the production of privileged forms of what he termed ‘linguistic capital’ (1977). According to Bourdieu’s 1977 paper, ‘*The economics of linguistic exchange’*, linguistic capital is denoted by the authority, confidence and prestige accorded to high-status language users when they speak or write. Individuals with ‘high’ linguistic capital therefore, have authority and can ‘command’ particular readings of their utterances. Higher education academic writing practices are clearly demarcated in society as one such exclusive ‘linguistic field’, a distinction which can nonetheless accommodate numerous disciplinary differences (Maton, 2008). Therefore, the link between the development of an academic’s professional identity and capital and their production of disciplinary-based academic writing functions as a direct manifestation of the power of linguistic capital.

Moreover, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) state that the production of high status forms of academic literacy, such as the doctoral thesis, edited book collections, monographs and academic journal articles, embody cultural as well as linguistic capital, which for academics, denotes high professional status within the Academy and beyond in wider society. Sullivan (2001), drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant’s work further defined linguistic capital as, “the ability to understand and use “‘educated’ language” (p.893). This function can clearly be seen in action with regard to elevated professional academic positions, such as Reader or Professor, which usually require applicants to evidence, through peer-review of one sort or another, a sustained ability to write at an advanced academic level within their disciplinary field. (4). One can, therefore, characterise academic writing as a privileged and exclusive linguistic form, which signifies not only the high status of the institution from which it emanates and the inferred ‘learnedness’ of the academic producing it, but also the educatedness (potential or otherwise) of the intended audience who consume it.

The high stakes attached to higher education academic writing make it especially sensitive to claims and counterclaims with regard to the authentication and legitimation of what is ‘good’ or simply acceptable academic writing. To show how academics develop and maintain, for themselves and their students, ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ higher education academic writing identities I have adapted and combined Cummins’ ‘Academic Expertise Framework’ (2009) and Polanyi’s (1966) notion of ‘tacit spaces’ (see Figure 1 below) to help explain how the interconnectedness that characterises a professional academic writing habitus develops though everyday work practices in higher education. The resulting hybrid illustrates how the development of particular academic writing practices are mediated, not only at a macro level, through contact with institutional signifiers, such as ‘graduateness’ (for students) and ’professional expertise’ ( for academics); but at a micro level, through the constant interactions and interplay between colleagues, students and texts within the Academy.

I also use my adaptation to analyse the extent to which this mediation of professional identity through academic writing practices and conventions creates opportunities for professional academic ‘identity negotiation and identity investment’ (p.264) as individual’s become educated and/or embark on a career educating others and developing their academic writing.

With its emphasis on the interplay between discourse, power and interpersonal spaces where disciplinary knowledges are generated and professional academic identities are negotiated, Cummins’ framework helps elucidate the ways in which higher education academics are rhizomically positioned and subsequently empowered or disempowered by their relationship to the academic writing practices and texts that mediate their micro-interactions and movement through inter-personal spaces in higher education.

ACADEMICS AND STUDENTS

DOMINANT DISCOURSES IN HE

**MACRO AND MICRO INTERACTIONS BETWEEN ACADEMICS AND STUDENTS**

MEDIATED BY ITERACTION WITH AND BETWEEN ACADEMIC WRITING PRACTICES AND TEXTS

CREATION OF TACIT INTERPERSONAL SPACES WITHIN WHICH ACADEMIC WRITING IDENTITIES (FOR PROFESSIONALS AND STUDENTS) ARE NEGOTIATED THUS CREATING AN ACADEMIC WRITING IN HIGHER EDUCATION HABITUS

Figure 1: Adapted version of Cummins (2009) and Polanyi (1983) in French (2014)

These macro and micro interactions around academic writing practices inform the ‘professional higher education academic writing habitus’ discussed below which over time help to develop and support quite distinct professional writing identities over the course of academics’ working lives.

**Conceptualisations of academic writing in higher education**

It is relatively straightforward to identify certain desired and/or technically accurate features of formal academic writing involving syntax, spelling, punctuation and grammar. However, actually understanding and articulating what constitutes ‘good academic writing’ in higher education, both within and across academic disciplines, at any level and for any purpose (for example, assessing summative assignments for undergraduates or peer reviewing for an academic journal) is notoriously difficult (Street, 2005, Lillis, 2001, Ivanic and Lea, 2006; Turner, 2018). This is largely due to its essentially abstract and situated nature. (5). My analysis of the qualitative data collected as part of my thesis (which focused on lecturers’ perceptions of academic writing in higher education) reinforced my belief that identifying ‘good’ academic writing, in any given context, is always a complex, fluid and potentially contested process. This realisation in turn encouraged me to develop a rhizomic model of a ‘professional higher education writing habitus’, which aimed to conceptualise how academics’ professional identities are formed and recognised through the production of different kinds of professional academic writing.

Initially, in order to try and capture the complexity and multiplicity of academic writing practices which constitute my notion of a ‘professional writing in higher education writing habitus’, I contrast traditional ideas about academic writing with an alternative conceptualisation, which draws heavily on Street (1984) and the whole New Literacy Studies (NLS) movement that his work helped to create. (6). Most significantly for my research, NLS established that language was not just a neutral technology of communication. Important NLS researchers like Barton and Hamilton (1998); Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, (2000); Gee (1996) and Street (1984, 1995) all helped replace the concept of ‘literacy’ with ‘literacies’. Moreover, they insisted that it was incorrect and potentially damaging to treat literacy as the product of a unitary, autonomous skill set that could be taught or learned independently of its context of use.

The traditional conceptualisations of academic writing outlined on the left had side of Figure 2 below reflects the broadly utilitarian, technicist model of academic writing that prevails in higher education. Furthermore, it explains why many academics develop particular and predictable orientations towards their own and their students’ academic writing (Ivanic and Lea, 2006).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Traditional conceptualisation of academic writing** | **Problematised conceptualisation of academic writing** |
| Autonomous | Ideological |
| Objective | Subjective |
| Technicist skills set | Social practice |
| Universal | Situated |
| Functional | Creative |
| Performative | Developmental |
| Fixed | Fluid |

Figure 2 Conceptualisations of academic writing (French, 2014, unpublished PhD)

Conversely, the problematised conceptualisation of academic writing in Figure 2 destabilises traditional ideas about the value and quality of academic writing in higher education. Problematising or reconceptualising academic writing in this way means it can be viewed, like other social practices in higher education, as part:

[…] 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 and Duguid, 1989, p.1)

Street (1984), also used this kind of situated conceptualisation of writing as a social practice to propose an alternative social, ‘ideological’ model of literacy which:

[...] offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This [ideological] model starts from different premises than the autonomous model – it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill [...]. It is about knowledge: the ways in which people address reading and writing are themselves rooted in conceptions of knowledge, identity, being. (Street, 1984, pp.7-8)

This more situated, ‘culturally sensitive view of literacy practices’ makes it possible to connect undergraduate academic writing development to the formation of a later distinct professional higher education identity. For example, I have argued elsewhere ( French, 2014, 2017) that successful undergraduate academic writing in higher education involves, not only the performance of disciplinary knowledge production and exchange, but a requirement to present what I have called specific ‘disciplinary-congruent academic writing’ through the writing practices adopted in doing so. Internalising this interconnection between the earliest successful undergraduate academic writing and the creation of a positive academic identity is, I would argue, the first step in the creation of a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ that carries some high-performing undergraduates onwards to a career as professional academics. In the next section I explore how this link between writing and identity can be theorised through the work of Bourdieu.

**Mobilising habitus and doxa: developing a ‘Writing in a professional higher education habitus’**

(7). Having established the link between the professional identity and capital in higher education and academic writing, I now seek to show how Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa and habitus help to understand explore how and why professional academics begin and continue to write in particular ways within their given academic settings and discourses. Habitus, doxa and the notion of rhizomic modelling are mobilised in this paper to represent how individual ‘life-wide’ social and historical experiences of academic writing practices work together to develop an evolving ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ as outlined in the rhizomic map below (Figure 3). This specific adaptation and conflation of Bourdieusian and Deluzean concepts seeks to reconcile, as I go on to discuss, both the constraints and possibilities experienced by higher education academics as they seek to establish themselves professionally through various writing practices as lecturers, researcher and experts.

Habitus, in its broadest sense, was characterised by Bourdieu in *The State Nobility* as:

A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or a particular section of that world - a field - which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu, 1996, p.81)

Habitus is therefore constituted by everyday social interactions and practices within a given social field. Academic writing and wider professional choices in Academia take place within Bourdieusian fields, for example, institutional settings and disciplinary networks, which constitute, for the individuals who move within and across them:

[…] a meaningful world, a world endowed with sense or with value […]

(Bourdieu, in Wacquant, 1989, p.44)

Doxa, another term coined by Bourdieu in 1977, is used to describe the wider tacit agreements and unspoken understandings which underpin accepted or expected behaviours or practices in any given social context so that it:

[…] provides the illusion of immediate understanding, characteristic of practical experience of the familiar universe, and which at the same time excludes from that experience any inquiry as to its own conditions of possibility. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 60)

Doxa, in this paper, is used specifically to explore how an individual academic’s personally felt beliefs, values and everyday practice, are unconsciously influenced or informed by wider dominant disciplinary, institutional and social discourses. This means that I have looked to the uses and practices of academic writing:

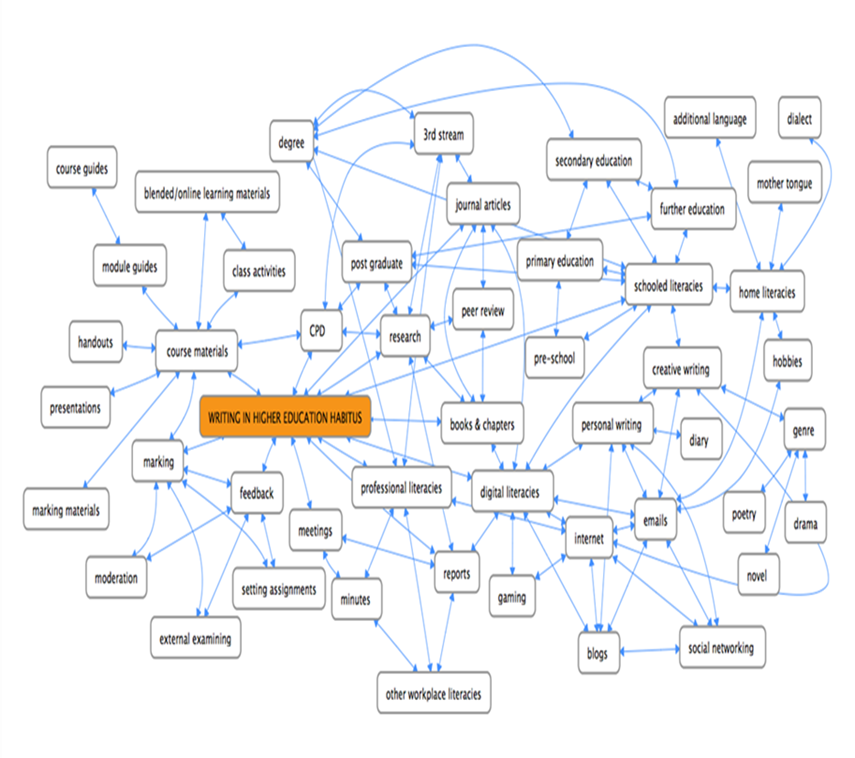
[…] with an eye to the ways in which historical and social forces have shaped a person’s [‘professional writing in higher education habitus’] and thus impinge upon that person's actions in the moment […] (Bartlett and Holland, 2002. p.6)

This concept of a “person’s action in the moment” is important as it is a reminder that habitus and doxa are not is not fixed things, they can and will change over time according to an individual’s experiences and surroundings.

What is interesting is that doxa often remains at an unconscious level ‘unless disturbed by events that cause self-questioning’ (Reay, 2004, p.369). However, if doxa *is* disturbed it can cause individuals to begin to question or resist the norms or expectations that characterise their social environment or their place within it. This paper seeks to re-present academics’ ‘familiar universe’ of higher education academic writing development by representing it rhizomically as a form of habitus, rather than a smooth arc of growing competence and confidence. This allows one to envisage professional academic identity formation through asking questions like:

How well adapted is the individual [academic] to the context they find themselves in? How does personal history shape their responses to the contemporary setting? […] Are structural effects [affecting the production of academic writing] visible within small scale interactions? (Reay, 1995, p.369)

Figure 3 depicts, in rhizomic form, how an academic professional’s life-long and life- wide experiences of writing as well as the various roles and relationships that they support in higher education, such as; lecturer/student, student/student and academic/publisher, are completely entangled with each other. It is important to note that the rhizome (Figure 2) presents all these experiences, roles and practices on one plane, they are not heirarchised or ranked. Rather, what is significant is their interconnectedness. Moreover, the movement of any one individual across such a rhizomic map will be different and constantly subject, or open to change, as different writing experiences and relationships forge new professional academic writing connections.

**** Figure 3: Writing in a professional higher education habitus (French 2014, unpublished PhD)

The idea of habitus, when viewed as a rhizome like this, requires:

[…] a relational mode of thinking that goes beyond surface empirical practices […]. (Maton, 2008 p.61).

(8). Relational in this sense means that the rhizome forces one to think about forms of academic writing in terms of how they are characterised or constituted by the various contextual relations within which individuals experience them (such as disciplinary networks). This is because although the higher education writing events and practices contained in Figure 2 share the same ‘surface empirical practices’, such as correct spelling , grammar and punctuation, they are also wildly different according to how, where and why they are experienced. Individual researchers, lecturers, academic writers and writing developers in higher education are always, therefore, feeding into and drawing on a whole range of writing practices. Some may be very distant, for example childhood writing experiences, where one may have learned to write in a particular way for an exam, or have simply written stories for pleasure. However, experiences in adult life might mean one acquires other, distinct non-academic literacies through different forms of employment or participation in leisure activities. Whatever paths one takes, however:

[…] no two individual [writing] histories are identical and no two individual [writing] habituses are identical. (Bourdieu, 1990, p.46).

This diversity might give the impression that at every stage and in every aspect of academic life (as in any sphere of life) there is endless choice. However, in education, as in life, Bourdieu argued that pre-existing fields of activity sustain rules and/or taken-for-granted practices, like academic writing in higher education, that are imposed (without necessarily being explicitly stated) and which constrain those who seek to engage with them. The data collected from academics in my thesis, moreover, suggested that in higher education disciplinary fields structure professional academic writing practices by defining, albeit artificially, the range of possible and acceptable actions and behaviours available to those writing within them (Grenfell, 2004). Bourdieu (1984) also explored how reification of social practices, like academic writing, can render them invisible and somewhat inevitable as alternative ways of doing things or thinking become ‘obscured by the realities of ordinary sense-experience’ (p.22). (9) Reification, in this way, helps explain, for example, the ‘discourse of transparency’ around academic writing practices identified by Lillis and Turner (2001). Such transparency is the result of the slow, often unconscious, acculturation of most academics into their disciplinary-based academic writing practices. The resulting ‘taken for grantedness’ around academic writing causes many academics to struggle to define what they actually mean by ‘good academic writing’. This is because they have internalised the conventions that they expect to see in students’ work to the extent that they no longer see them as learned conventions they simply embody what ‘good writing’ self-evidently is.

Bourdieu (1985) also asserts that habitus does not mean that individual attitudes and behaviours are wholly predetermined by the established discourses and practices that characterise the fields within which they operate. Rather, he described how ‘choices’ can be viewed more productively as the product of a ‘system of dispositions’ (1990, p. 45) which emerge out of an individual’s participation in and exposure to a range of social settings and discursive ‘fields’ across their life-span. These dispositions, moreover, are characterised by a:

[…] vagueness...the more-or-less, which define(s) one’s ordinary relation to the world. (1990, p.54)

Which is to say that they can exist as a set of external rules, assumptions and expectations, whilst being simultaneously internalised, and experienced as natural and given. Within Bourdieu’s theory of dispositions there are, even within identifiable fields of action, potentially limitless individual:

[…] possibilities and impossibilities, freedoms and necessities, opportunities and prohibitions… (1990, p.54)

However, Reay’s (2004) operationalised take on habitus suggests that it actually functions to exclude some practices, or forms of practice, within a given field, as unthinkable (even though they may be entirely possible), whilst, at the same time, predisposing individuals towards other ‘certain, predictable ways of behaving’ (2004 p.432). Similarly, Nash’s school-based research into attainment (2002) suggests ways in which habitus creates a particular ‘state of mind’ for educators, which is made up of ‘effective dispositions’ (p.46) that feel right within their wider educational framework or doxa in which they are working. As Reay (2004) points out, therefore, the choices any individual makes are often taken within:

[…] an internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable. (p. 434)

As an example of how such an internalised framework can develop through the auspices of a ‘writing in higher education habitus’ one can consider how undergraduate writing for education purposes is inevitably framed and informed by the (often tacit) requirements of the discipline, which exert a primary regulatory function on their writing. However, and somewhat paradoxically, despite the disciplinary-congruent expectations which inform many undergraduate assessments, students are often told that they should be developing their own ‘academic voice’ (Lillis and Thomas 2001). This kind of contradiction persists throughout any professional academic’s career, whether it be writing a doctoral thesis or responding to the request for revisions for a peer-reviewed journal. In this way, I argue that individuals, at any stage in academia never *chose* to write in a particular way for academic purposes, rather their academic writing can be seen as arising out of a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’, which itself is a:

[…] complex, internalized core from which everyday experiences emanates (Reay, 2004, p.435)

which potentially create endless opportunities for what Reay (2004) calls:

[…] adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to ‘the way the world is’ (p. 437)

However, as I explore in the next section, there is always potential for struggle around academics engagement with academic writing, not only due to the essential instability of writing as a process, but because of the ongoing tensions that exist between individual habitus disciplinary networks and communities of practice in higher education.

**Communities of practice and disciplinary networks and their contribution to a professional academic writing habitus**

Bourdieusian concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ are a useful way of exploring the influence of communities of practice, such as disciplinary networks, on the formation of professional academic writing identities within a rhizomic ‘habitus’ model. In their professional writing careers academics are constantly positioning their writing in relation to other, more established writers in their field, who themselves exemplify various theoretical and aesthetic writing identities through their careers (and who fall in and out of fashion). It was certainly the case that the participants who contributed to my thesis on lecturer’s perception of academic writing were very aware that they had to find their place amongst influential past and current members of their disciplinary-based networks and the academic writing communities which they supported).

Moreover, feeling that one belongs to and can contribute to one’s disciplinary network (or ‘field of action’) is a crucial component in novice academics’ belief that they are developing into ‘real’ academics (or not) (Lea, 2005, Gourlay, 2009, 2011; Leathwood, 2008). This sense of belonging as a professional writer in the Academy is linked to the abiding and complex relationship that I have discussed previously in this paper between the production of what is considered to be appropriate academic writing (by one’s tutors or peers) and the formulation of a positive professional academic identity. It is the nature of disciplinary networks and communities of practice to influence the academic reading undertaken in any subject area from students’ undergraduate days onwards. This is important because disciplinary reading informs, even if it is only in oppositionary terms, the kind of academic writing professional academics are required and expected to produce as recognised members of a particular disciplinary network or community of practice.

Like the academic literacies model outlined for students (Street, 2004) it is clear that, in practice, academics usually end up, often haphazardly ‘socialising themselves’, with greater or lesser degrees of success, into an appropriate professional writing identity through their membership of various disciplinary networks and communities of practice over the course of their career. Moreover, individual academics may identify with particular professional communities, whilst their membership of such communities will be reinforced or marginalised through other social/cultural fields that they feel they belong to, or are excluded from, through say their sexuality, gender or political affiliation.

Academics usual, rather uneven progress within their disciplinary can be explained in part through Warhurst’s (2008) critiques how the development of educational professionals in higher education has often been unproblematically theorised through the concept of apprentice/master or communities of practice. He points out that communities of practice are characterised by different kinds of members and forms of membership with permeable and shifting boundaries and competing, as well as complementary, practices. Wenger (1998), moreover, acknowledges that individuals are always simultaneously members of a number of practice communities and that they always bring their prior experiences of community membership to each new community of practice that they join. Similarly, membership of a new community will modify previous learning experiences. Wenger (1998) writes:

[…] we engage in different practices in each of the communities of practice to which we belong. We often behave rather differently in each of them, construct different aspects of ourselves, and gain different perspectives. (p.159)

Relationships between members in any community of practice are, therefore, never straightforward and always mutable. They often shift and need to take account of factors such as new hierarchies, emerging identities and changing relationships, which can all affect members differently as they join and leave different communities. For example, in higher education, students often ‘buddy up’ either formally or informally and help each other cope with the higher education experience. Whilst academics, who are often involved in their own research and professional development, simultaneously operate in higher education as teachers and learners, mentors and mentees. Each of these roles empowers or disempowers individuals, affecting professional relationships between them within communities of practice.

However, even when taking into account the shifting complexity of communities of practice it can be argued dominant academic writing discourses (embodied by different disciplinary fields) expedite the formation of an recognisable professional academic writing habitus for individual academics. That is to say, the disciplinary-based academic writing practices and the forms of legitimated writing that they facilitate are largely contingent on the established conventions of the communities of practice legitimising their forms of production. One could therefore argue that membership of communities of practice and disciplinary networks function as a self-affirming, self-regulating, ultimately conservative force within the Academy, whilst professional academic writers emerge as the product of a self-referential and mutually reinforcing ‘professional higher education writing habitus’. Paradoxically, this occurs despite the fact that the most highly-regarded academic writing is usually presented as the supreme conduit for individualised intellectual understanding and expression.

These tensions, between individual academics and the professional groups ( formal and informal) they are members mean that professional writing identities, like other aspects of professional academic identity such as teaching or supervising, are continually being made and re-made through a process of negotiation and struggle conducted at the level of action within in the field.

This means that it is difficult to claim a:

[…] unidirectional movement of novices from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership of a community of practice […] (Colley and James, 2005, p.1)

instead, as this paper has suggested, the movement is more rhizomic, embracing the potentiality of each academic’s disciplinary academic writing experiences, professional opportunities and personal inclinations.

**Conclusions**

This paper has drawn attention to the extent to which professional academic writing practices inform and legitimate professional academic writing identities which are mediated and sustained though the development of a distinct a ‘professional higher education academic writing habitus’. I have tried to connect professional academic writing practices and the notion of doxa and habitus to a broadly postmodern theoretical framework about identity-formation and professionalism for academics in higher education. In doing so I have drawn attention to the extent to which disciplinary-congruent professional academic writing communities in higher education are often very conservative, encouraging compliance rather than fostering challenge and innovation, especially from new lecturers, such as those studied by Archer (2008). Moreover, the fact that conferment or assumption of a professional academic identity ( by one’s peers) is usually dependent on an individual’s academic writing credentials, reinforces the idea, explored throughout this paper, that the reproduction of dominant academic writing practices are central to what it means to be a professional academic. Correspondingly, the formation of a positive academic /professional identity is partially, but crucially created and sustained through the development of what I have called a ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’.

This paper has suggested that individual academic writing and writing development practices can be theorised as products of a broad ‘professional writing in higher education habitus’ which can be viewed in the same way as Bourdieu’s notion of a ‘schooled’ or ‘cultured habitus’. All are structured and restructured by an individual academic’s historical experience of writing in and for disciplinary fields and educational settings encountered throughout their professional academic careers. Conscious knowledge of the doxa of higher education, its dominant discourses and the power relations that they underpin has implications, therefore, for the ease, or not, with which a successful ‘professional higher education writing habitus’ might be formed.

For this reason, this paper concludes that professional academics, would benefit (like students, who also often struggle with understanding what academic writing in their discipline actually is, or is for) from a greater critical, theoretical awareness of the ways in which academic writing experiences and expectations inform their professional identity. This awareness is important as it potentially opens up a space for individuals to consciously expand their professional academic writing habitus, to move more nomadically across the rhizomic landscape they inhabit as professional writers in order to explore more innovative, variegated forms of professional academic writing. This, in turn, could diversify and invigorate the idea of what it means to be a successful professional academic writer in higher education.

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