'Let the right ones in! '* Widening participation, academic writing and the standards debate in higher education.
*The title of this paper has been adapted from the Swedish vampire thriller 'Let the right one in' written by John Ajvide Lindqvist (2007).

Abstract

*This paper challenges the frequently expressed concern, post-1992, that widening participation (WP) has contributed to a general 'dumbing down' of higher education in English universities *(Burke, 2005; Leathwood, 2010). In particular, it explores the implications of a long-standing 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972) about the poor quality of students' academic writing, particularly in the 'new' universities, which have been raised in various academic reports and countless media articles. A vampire metaphor is used throughout the paper to highlight ways in which assumptions about these falling standards in undergraduates' academic writing feed on the foundations of a longstanding, albeit implicit, distrust of the growth in the sector on elitist, ideological grounds.*

The second half of the paper investigates how academic writing practices, whilst difficult to define, nonetheless wield a 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1980), over lecturers and students in the academy. This includes a discussion about how a situated, New Literacy Studies (NLS) approach to academic writing development challenges the view that students' academic writing standards are falling. In contrast, the paper suggests that all universities have a responsibility to acknowledge and develop the different literacies that students, especially widening participation students, bring with them to university.

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 * The UK has a system of devolved government. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have distinctive higher education systems which form part of the responsibilities of the Secretaries of State for each part of the UK. This paper refers to issues mainly arising in English higher education institutions.

key words: widening participation, academic literacies, higher education reform

A metaphor for modern times - Part one

> Any treatment of the figure of the other is an ideological moment that can be usefully interpreted for political and cultural significance...
> (Gordon & Hollinger, 1997 p. 2)

Vampires, are the ultimate 'Other' and have been used to reflect and deflect fears about transformation and change in books, art and film, over many centuries and across different cultures (Auerbach,1995; Barber,1988; Glover,

1996). In Jungian theory, vampires exist as a creature of exchange in a relationship where the vampire is held in a potentially fatal symbiosis, sustained only by the energy drawn from its host. According to some versions of the myth, moreover, the host cannot escape from the vampire, once they have been voluntarily let in across the threshold (Spence, 1960).

The vampire is most often portrayed as a symbol of the parasitic rich, who sustain themselves by exploiting the poor. A typical example can be found in the work of Marx, who defined capital as, '...dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour' (1990, p. 91). Similarly, Count Dracula has been interpreted as a symbol of the corrupt *Ancien regime* who exploits his privileged social standing to leach off the peasantry. However, if one takes Policante's (2010) idea that relationships around capital, economic and cultural, are analogous to any bond between the vampire and their host, then it is possible to subvert the traditional relationship to create a new productive reading. In this alternative configuration, powerless vampire figures can only survive by gaining access to a powerful host. Importantly, as is made clear in Lindquist's book 'Let the right one in', vampires can only gain such access if they are invited in across the threshold by the host, who of course ordinarily has many means, (and a vested interest), in keeping them out.

In this paper's inverted analogy, the literal blood of the vampire's host is represented by higher education's cultural capital, a resource which widening participation (WP) students do not have, and to which they have been traditionally been denied access. (WP students are drawn from social groups historically unrepresented at British universities over the last thirty years of reform. They are often represented and positioned negatively within an expanded higher education sector).

One aspect of the analogy is that WP students, like vampires, had to be invited in to higher education (the host). Moreover, the WP agenda initially appeared very sexy and seductive, like traditional vampires do, to those powerful politicians and academics frustrated by the traditional elitism of higher education (Archer, 2007). However, it was not long before critics of WP began to make a connection between the expansion of higher education in England and increasing participation of non-traditional students. It was a connection most commonly expressed as a fear that due to WP, standards were falling in the sector, especially with regard to students' academic writing.

If, as Auerbach (1995) claims, 'Vampires go where power is...' (p. 6), the hidden subtext of the WP/vampire analogy raises many questions, such as, is the presence of so many non-traditional students really threatening the quality of higher education and are the number of higher education institutions (HEIs), especially those that take large number of WP students, sustainable in the current economic climate ?

In short, has higher education let too many of the wrong ones in?

The growth of the higher education sector

Despite the dip in applications since 2012, which have been attributed to the increase in tuition fees (the implications of which remain difficult to predict); figures from the Higher Education Academy webpage, (2011/12) show a steady rise in the number of full and part-time undergraduates over the last thirty years. The resulting 'massification' of higher education (Scott, 1995), is a social phenomenon driven by various, often contradictory, social and ideological impulses, including globalisation and a political commitment to free up economic markets (Allen & Ainley, 2007; Ball, 2008). Yet although the expansion of the sector has initiated a positive transformation for some institutions, across the whole sector it has arguably had a destabilising effect (Archer, 2007).

Some commentators celebrate the change from a hitherto quite restricted, elitist university system into the more open-access system that we have today (Young and Muller, 2007; Weis, McCarthy & Dimitriades, 2006). Yet from the start WP has had its detractors, such as some members of the Conservative Party, who fear that letting increasing numbers of non-traditional students into higher education will result a dilution of academic standards (Kallenbach, 2003). Even students themselves have voiced fears that not enough resources will be made available to support WP properly, resulting in falling standards (Curtis, 2004). However, Burke (2008) notes that such

> ...concerns about quality and WP are often juxtaposed in policy discourses, reinforcing differences, misrecognitions and exclusions (p.2).

It is the 'differences, misrecognitions and exclusions' characterising the debates around higher education, WP, falling standards and academic writing practices that this paper concerns itself with.

The distribution of WP in higher education

Currently in the England, as elsewhere in the UK, there is certainly a diverse range of institutions and degrees for students to choose from in higher education. One might think, given its recent expansion, that there would be a correspondingly greater number of WP students taking up those opportunities across the sector. However, any analysis of the socio-economic intake of individual university student populations reveals that WP in higher education has actually been uneven and even inequitable across English institutions. To be precise, the numbers of WP students differ substantially according to the type of institution, mode of study and type and level of course undertaken (Boliver, 2011; Reay, David and Ball, 2005; York & Longton, 2007).

The majority of WP students in England attend the 'post-1992' institutions (these are the former polytechnics, central institutions or colleges of higher education, given university status in 1992 through 'The Further and Higher Education Act'). Often called 'new' universities, they generally ask for lower

entry criteria than the older higher education institutions (HEIs) which tend to be more selective. In comparison, the 2012 report '*Widening Participation in Higher Education*' which is produced by the government department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), revealed that 'the top third of Higher Education Institutions' in England most commonly take three grade A, A level grades as their entry criteria (2012, p. 20). According to the report,

> The estimated progression rate for state school and college pupils to the most selective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) was 26% in 2009/10, the same as the previous year. The equivalent progression rate for independent school and college pupils was 65% in 2009/10, which had risen by 3 percentage points since 2008/09' (pg, 20)

This difference, between the estimated progression rate for state school and college pupils to the most selective HEIs, has remained consistent since 2006/07 and has resulted in a concentration of WP students, including those with vocational or professional qualifications, in 'new' post 1992 universities. However, as the BIS report notes,

> It remains a question whether this distribution across HEIs constitutes fair access... (p.21)

Despite the many interrelated personal factors affecting WP patterns which include worries about the cost, needing to work, and fear of failure and/or fitting in (Hutchings & Archer, 2001; Reay, Crozier & James, 2008), research also suggests that WP in higher education has also consistently been affected by entrenched educational inequalities, (Allen & Ainley, 2007; Archer, 2003; Ball, 2008; Burke 2005, Reay, David and Ball, 2005). For example, the link between lower academic achievement at A Level and lower socio-economic status is well-documented (Ball, 2008; Reay, 2006). Not surprisingly, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's report, *Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators,* reveals that in the UK young people in affluent areas were five times more likely to go to (any) university than those in poorest areas.

A metaphor for modern times - Part two

> Perhaps we live in a continuing crisis...that sometimes takes the shape of vampires.... (Auerbach, 1995, p. 117)

Vampire hosts, once bitten, are irreversibly altered and begin to act in different and unpredictable ways, so much so that their behaviour often threatens the host communities that they inhabit. An interest in vampires often appears during periods of social change and uncertainty where, because they have the power to transform people with whom they come into contact, they personify a fear of being pitched from what is known, into a radical discontinuity that cannot be controlled (Auerbach, 1995).

Education also has the ability to be transformative, especially for those who have been traditionally denied it. As Friere (1972), famously asserts in Pedagogy of the Oppressed,

> Education either functions as an instrument which can...bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p.34).

WP promises individuals, not historically expected to go to university, the possibility of personal transformation. In wider social terms, WP's appeal centres on its potential to challenge national educational inequalities and facilitate structural change in the sector (Reay, David, & Ball, 2005).

Higher education's academic writing 'crisis'
Foucault (1980) represents the status quo as the 'sovereign power' of social elites who seek to maintain their control of powerful institutions like universities. The social experiment that is WP was designed to open up and transform England's traditionally exclusive higher education system by dismantling educational barriers and challenging the traditional class identities and identifications associated with university entry (Reay et.al. 2008). However, O'Farrell (2005) discusses how the liberalisation or democratisation of powerful institutions, like universities, often produces a counter-culture of fear and danger which opposes discourses of change. This, he argues, is because democratisation threatens, or at best renders conditional, the traditional privileges enjoyed by powerful groups in society. Bearing this in mind Cohen's (1972) theory about moral panics provides another useful way of contextualising the perceived decline in higher education standards. For example, Furedi (1994) discusses how moral panics occur specifically when institutions or communities find it difficult to adapt or deal with any change that appears to threaten their core values.

It is not perhaps surprising therefore, that much of the culture of fear around change in higher education has coalesced around WP and the 'post-1992' expansion of the higher education sector that has facilitated it. As one media commentator so memorably put it;

> Now the Government says that almost any institution teaching students can claim the title "university". Whatever it says on the label, many universities may soon be de facto further education colleges. Universities have adopted a bums-on-seats attitude, lowering entry standards and making courses easier in order to meet their recruitment targets. (Hulme, 2003).

Neo-liberal politicians and middle-class media pundits have frequently mobilised around this fear of falling standards in an expanded higher education sector. Furedi, in the TES, talks pointedly about what he calls 'fear entrepreneurship' (2005) in the media. This, he argues, thrives on

unsubstantiated scaremongering about educational standards, often at the expense of any considered debate informed by research. It is an approach typified by the following assertion made in The Independent that;

> ...the value of a British university education does not seem to have increased with the numbers admitted... (Dejevsky, 2010).

In formulating the current policy and reforms across higher education the current British coalition government has trod a careful and often ambiguous line between preserving the argument for cuts to higher education, alongside promises to improve standards. They have also tried to keep up a commitment to social justice for the educationally disadvantaged, through initiatives and financial incentives, such as the 'pupil premium' which was included in both the Liberal Democrat and Conservative General Election manifestos in the 2010 British general election.

Nonetheless, the current tenor of political discourse about the future of higher education, in an age of austerity, has had the effect of exacerbating the often damaging divisions and hierarchies historically built in to the sector (Locke, 2010). Increasingly, higher education in England operates as a system where students are treated as little more than units of exchange in a knowledge economy, and where education and qualifications are fetishised as commodities (Kenway, 2006). Unfortunately, within such an aggressive arena some students, degrees and universities are openly deemed more valuable than others. This view is very evident in the recent Browne Review (2010), which Collini has argued is largely organised around a profoundly misguided 'perfect competition theory' that speaks to a particular elitist ideological tradition in higher education. As Collini (2010) states,

> ...Browne is contending that we should no longer think of higher education as the provision of a public good...Instead, we should think of it as a lightly regulated market in which consumer demand, in the form of student choice, is sovereign in determining what is offered by service providers (i.e. universities)...(p.23)

However, student choice is not and never can be 'sovereign', as access too many universities is highly competitive; places are over-subscribed and entry is conditional on qualifications gained within a deeply unequal, often distorted school system, (Ball, 2006; Chitty, 2002). Countless studies, (Allen & Ainley, 2007; Reay, 2006; Ball, 2008), have shown that the poor are often the poorly educated. As such, they have no clout as educational consumers in a cut-throat knowledge economy where funding, already scarce, is being cut further. In this context, Collini, argues that,

> ...the most likely effect of Browne's proposals... would be to exacerbate the financial disparity between types of university and, above all, to bring about a much closer correlation between the reputational

hierarchy of institutions and the social class of their student body (2010, p. 25).

The result of Browne's reforms therefore, could impact most severely on post-1992 universities, to the extent that they could call into question the economic viability of some institutions over the next few years (Leathwood, 2010, Scott, 2011). Not surprisingly many post-1992 universities have begun to charge lower fees to maintain any kind of market position. By September 2011, 24 post-1992universities and one Further Education College had lowered their tuition fees to below £7,500 a year (Ross & Collins, 2011). Conversely, The Daily Telegraph quotes Professor Simon Gaskell, principal of Queen Mary, University of London, as stating that many institutions are retaining top fees as a 'status symbol', to avoid 'being seen as substandard – not on the basis of cost' (Paton, 2012).

The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service's *End of Cycle* report for 2012 states that there were 51,000 (-13 per cent) fewer acceptances into English institutions, where tuition fees have trebled, in the 2012-13 academic year, than in the previous year. A recent report by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE): *Financial health of the higher education sector 2011-12 to 2014-15 forecasts* also warned that many institutions are experiencing 'recruitment difficulties', with enrolments down although no 'institutions are presently close to the risk of insolvency' (p.3). Funding pressures, combined with reduced student numbers, will inevitably put financial pressure on many institutions which will affect the range of degrees they can offer, the size of teaching groups and contact with tutors (Deem, 2010). As the HEFCE report concedes,

> ...if surpluses do not increase there is a risk that the quality of the infrastructure in the higher education sector will reduce, which will harm its long-term sustainability (p.2)

A metaphor for modern times - Part three

> [Vampires]...have the potential to directly challenge the dominant ideologies of sexism, white supremacy, homophobia, and capitalism ... (Gateward, 2004, p.18).

The vampire metaphor can be used not only to illuminate the reaction of powerful groups to liberalisation or democratisation, it can provide a means of resisting it too, because it draws attention to the conditionality, even fragility of what is 'normal' or 'natural' in terms of power relations in society. As a rich metaphorical figure the vampire has been utilised by a variety of radical, postmodern social commentators to represent marginalised and othered groups in a post-colonial, post-feminist world (Gomez, 1993; Holmes, 1997; Gordon & Hollinger, 1997).

Academic writing's role in the quality and standards debate

The ranking of universities in a market economy and problems with recruiting and funding have encouraged, often through media and political rhetoric, the 'othering' of WP students and the institutions that the majority of them attend. Specifically, concerns about academic writing have fused and confused the debate about quality and standards in higher education with WP students and their allegedly inferior academic writing (Burke, 2005; Hey & Leathwood, 2009).

Ganobcsik-William's report, *The Teaching of Academic Writing in UK Higher Education*, (2004), describes an historical preoccupation with the poor quality of some undergraduate academic writing, which it is claimed, threatens higher education's quality and its privileged social standing, both domestically, and increasingly internationally. Similarly, *Writing Matters,* a report produced by the Royal Literacy Fund (Davis, Swinburne & Williams, 2006) and Tomlinson's (2004) *14-19 Review* , also claimed that many higher education students come to university, post-massification, unable to write well enough to meet the demands of a quality higher education.

This concern around academic writing in higher education has been captured and normalised by sustained media and political rhetoric and the resulting 'amplification' of the issues creates a strong sense of drama as 'experts' and public commentators pronounce on the 'problem' (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994).   For example, it is reported in The Times that,

> Employers and others increasingly complain about the calibre of many graduates, not just in their chosen specialties – but in the basics, such as standards of written English...(Dejevsky, 2010)

Whilst The Independent newspaper claims that students,

> ...cannot write essays and are in danger of dropping out of university because they cannot string their thoughts together to write an essay (Garner, 2004)

Reporting like this creates a disaster narrative, or what Furedi called a 'panicky response'. This has created a perception, particularly in England, that undergraduate spelling and grammar are at 'crisis levels' (Smithers, 2003), in a higher education sector characterised by,

> ...Mickey Mouse' degrees and students who cannot cope with 'key concepts' and intellectual ideas... (Paton, 2009).

In this rather crude way, media claims that undergraduates, especially those attending less traditional universities simply cannot write well enough. This is a position that avoids any serious political and academic debate about the responsibility of all universities to improve their academic writing support for all students.

Just as there is little understanding in the media about how perceived shortcomings in students' academic writing can be tackled, so successive governments have sought to find ways of addressing the issue. For example, Dearing's *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education* (1997), identified a number of key skills, including 'appropriate writing skills', which it claimed university graduates often lacked. Consequently, it recommended that study skills be embedded into every degree, for all students. The more recent *White Paper: The Future of Higher Education* (2003) also called for a much greater emphasis on the development of 'communication skills', including writing, as a necessary part of undergraduate learning.

A metaphor for modern times - Part Four

> There is reason that all things are as they are, and did you see with my eyes and know with my knowledge, you would perhaps better understand. (Dracula speaking in Stoker, p.31)

If conceptions of 'normality', are not viewed as a product of power's operation but remain uncontested, then they can act as a disciplinary technology for those who do not or cannot embody the norm, or want to move beyond it. Consequently, vampires, by rupturing the illusion of normality or status quo, even though their force is destructive, can be seen as liberating and empowering.

Dominant academic writing discourses in higher education
In Western society, writing has traditionally been viewed as a decontextualised set of skills comprising spelling, punctuation and grammar, which can be applied universally without reference to any ideological and cultural values. This 'autonomous' (Street, 1984), model of writing is an example of how dominant social practices are often normalised and appear 'given'. As such, autonomous assumptions about writing are often difficult to challenge because they disguise,

> ...the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it and that can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal (Street, 2000, p.7).

Moreover, writing is the established, authoritative vehicle for autonomous self-expression throughout Western culture. This is nowhere more obvious than in higher education, where writing is the primary vehicle for the articulation of socially prestigious academic expertise (MacClure, 2006). On entering higher education, students are explicitly inducted into bounded disciplinary-based subjects. They are also, more implicitly, expected to construct a suitable academic writing identity through conformity to discipline-based, academic writing practices (Ivanic, 1998).

Given the above, one can argue that academic writing practices function as a form of 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1980), which is intangible and diffuse, difficult to deflect, whilst 'subjecting everyone to the possibility of surveillance at all times' (p.171).   With regard to academic writing practices, this 'disciplinary power' manifests itself as a kind of 'tacitness' around what different forms of academic writing actually look like and involve (Polanyi, 1967). The resulting lack of clarity creates uncertainty and confusion amongst lecturers and students around academic writing practices, resulting in what Lillis has called an, 'institutional practice of mystery' (2001, p.53). It is a mystery compounded by the idea that so called 'good' academic writing is actually notoriously difficult to define (Lillis, 2001, Lea & Street 1998, 2006). Despite this lack of transparency, a student's failure to meet disciplinary expectations around academic writing is likely to be construed as a personal problem or deficit for the offending student, rather than an institutional failure to meet their needs by the university.

This deficit model of academic writing development has created a situation where, regardless of the high stakes involved in the production of academic writing, many students find it difficult to work out how they can improve their academic writing, nor are they even clear about what kind of advice they should be asking for (Ivanic and Clarke, 1997; Ivanic, 1998; Lea and Stierer, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Over time, one can argue, a largely tacit approach to academic writing development in higher education has fashioned entrenched 'polarising discourses' which generate a crude binary between students who 'can' or 'cannot write' to an 'appropriate standard' (Williams, 1997).

However, little attention has been paid to how assumptions about academic writing have been socially and culturally constructed over time (Lillis & Turner, 2001). Previous educational experiences in school and beyond, undoubtedly affect students' familiarity and confidence with dominant academic writing practices (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001). For example, in many subjects and institutions academic writing practices hark back to a time when the majority of students entered university via a successful passage through a set of relatively homogeneous educational qualifications which deployed long-established 'essayist literacies' (Fairclough, 2001;Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). This is clearly no longer the case, especially for many WP students, who start their degrees having completed professional or vocational qualifications that rely on different, portfolio-based literacies. Others have either never acquired formal educational qualifications or have been out of education for a long time. The work of McGivney (1996) refers to the 'mystique of unfamiliarity and remoteness' facing WP students who have entered university through vocational or non-traditional routes. However, it is perhaps, the 'unfamiliarity and remoteness' of dominant academic writing practices for many WP students, that accounts for the perception that they are less capable students. It also helps explain why, despite its pervasive, disciplinary power, the concept of 'good' academic writing, remains stubbornly elusive for many students, especially those from WP backgrounds (Lillis & Turner, 2001; Ivanic & Clarke, 1997).

A metaphor for modern times - Part five

> The central event in vampire stories over the last thirty years is the vampire's transformation from monster or object of covert fascination to a protagonist embodying our utopian aspirations to freedom, self-acceptance, self-expression and community outside the restriction and conventions of conventional middle-class...society (Day, 2002, p. 32)

Vampires represent modern anxieties about boundaries precisely because they have the ability to dissolve them. They are the ultimate transgressors who struggle for freedom from the repression that their circumstances dictate. Contact with vampires offers, like participation in higher education, the opportunity for individuals to radically alter their identities and place in society. Though contact with vampirism, individuals pass over to an 'other' side, whilst through education they can be transformed through the alchemy of cultural capital and social mobility. It is this ability to transform that makes both experiences journeys into the unknown.

An academic literacies approach to academic writing
The question of how to effectively support the development of academic writing for **all** students is, it could be argued, part of the debate about the changing functions of a university in the twenty first century (Barnett, 2000; Hayton & Paczuska 2002; Thomas et al., 2005). New Literacy Studies (NLS) is an umbrella term which grew out of the work of the New London Group (1996), who first replaced the term 'literacy' with the concept of literacies. NLS theorists contend that it is unhelpful and potentially damaging to treat writing as the product of an autonomous skill set that can be taught or learned, independent of its context of use (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000, Gee, 1996). Street (1984), termed the NLS model of literacy, 'ideological' and situated, and argued that different forms of writing emerge out of particular contexts and social settings. NLS theories draw on Bernstein's (1996) contention that there is an infinite range of literacies that individuals can and do draw on in their everyday lives, both within and outside of formal or academic literacies. This means that in any educational setting, individuals always bring with them a whole range of literacies, formal and vernacular, that impact on their relationship to specific schooled literacies (Barton, et al., 2000; Barton & Tusting, 2005; Hamilton, 2000).

The development of a positive and potentially transformative academic writing identity is crucial to academic success (Ivanic, 1998). For this reason NLS theorists argue that lecturers and students need to be overtly engaged in exploring and challenging taken for granted, dominant assumptions about academic writing and writing development practices in higher education, (Ivanic, 1998; Lillis, 2001). Reay (2004), specifically draws on Bourdieu's (1985) concept of 'habitus' to suggest that the more familiar learners are with

established academic writing practices and expectations, the more easily they acquire positive learner and writer identities in higher education.

As this paper has discussed, higher education academic writing and writing development practices take place within institutions which may be highly pedagogised spaces in disciplinary terms, but which often lack a sense of clarity and criticality about what actually constitutes and supports learning generally, and academic writing specifically (Lea and Street, 1998; Ganobscik-Williams, 2006). Biggs (2003) argues that all forms of higher education learning may, for this reason, benefit from a more explicitly metacognitive pedagogic approach that foregrounds and problematises the processes involved in learning and teaching. Central to Barnett's (2000) argument is the idea that universities inhabit a 'supercomplex' world in which they are not sole, authoritative producers and reproducers of information or knowledge in particular fixed forms. Indeed, Barnett argues that in a modern academy the nature and status of any epistemological claims are increasingly debatable and contestable, as are the forms of academic writing deployed to express them. Academic writing practices in higher education should therefore, according to Barnett (2000), be progressively developed via the negotiation of a number of contested critical metanarratives or frameworks through which students' learning and understanding can be expressed.

For this reason the range of literacies that WP students bring with them to university should, far from being a cause for concern, serve as a catalyst, opening up spaces for a whole new way of thinking about, and supporting, academic writing and writing development practices and pedagogies within higher education teaching and learning. Developing academic writing practices that are cognisant of these diverse literacies, could form the start of a debate about how the expansion of the higher education sector should be about far more than simply recruiting a wider range of students to existing programmes and assessing those programmes using established forms of written assessment (Ivanic, 1998; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001, Lillis & McKinney, 2003). There is, therefore an urgent and corresponding need to challenge out-dated and often discriminatory political and academic orthodoxies about which academic writing practices are 'correct', which institutions are the 'best' and who the 'right' kind of students are.

A metaphor for modern times - Part six

> Vampire stories clarify the tensions and commonalities between our various ideas of humanity and ethics and our relation to tradition. By exploring these ideas in stories of the mysterious, dangerous and terrifying, we gain a sense of how deeply resonant these issues are for us. (Day, 2002, p. 168)

This paper has, through its use of a vampire analogy, sought to understand and challenge the negative associations often made between the WP agenda and fears about falling academic writing standards in English universities. It

contends that despite the recent sector reforms and threatened cuts we need to keep letting lots of different kinds of people in to university. Moreover, it claims that challenging dominant and normative conceptions of academic writing and writing development will help demystify it and engender new and exciting ways of encouraging and supporting positive academic writing identities for all students. This is important, for as Auerbach (1995) writes, vampires are 'disturbingly close to the mortals that they prey on' (p. 6).

(4911 words)

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