

In this paper we explore the possibilities that Twitter offers for building communities of academic writers, and enhancing the quality of our writing. We describe our experience of developing #Acwri – a Twitter-based support network that aims to identify common challenges in the writing process; enable participants to reflect on their own practice as writers; and share strategies for effective writing. Acwri ‘meets’ on Twitter fortnightly, using synchronous tweets (messages) and a keyword (#acwri – short for academic writing), enabling anyone with a Twitter account to follow and/participate. The network originated from a concern that whilst the process of writing is a core part of what academics do, there are relatively few fora to discuss the challenges of writing, and this has the potential to create feelings of isolation, especially for those in the early stages of their career, such as PhD students. Our paper on #Acwri considers two key issues – the spatiality of the network (particularly ideas of events and assemblages), and what the impact of tweeting might be for the writers who take part, and the writing they subsequently produce.

#Acwri sessions are convened by two geographically remote academic researchers (who have only ever met via Twitter), and is designed to create a space in which writers from different disciplines, career stages and countries can unpick a particular aspect of writing (topics covered so far include motivation, writing tools, time management, and blogs and blogging). Whilst each #Acwri session has a pre-defined topic and some general question areas, the exact focus and direction of the discussion is shaped by what participants choose to tweet about (and who chooses to tweet). So #Acwri is best conceptualised as a series of *events* which have a

degree of unpredictability and 'suprisingness', rather than formal meetings with pre-defined structure (Morson, 1994; Thrift, 2000).

#Acwri differs from traditional reading/writing groups which bring together groups of (often familiar) colleagues in one physical place. The #Acwri network is open, and following Deleuze, might be thought of as an 'assemblage':

... an ad hoc grouping, a collectivity whose origins are historical and circumstantial, though its contingent status says nothing about its efficacy, which can be quite strong. An assemblage is, second, a living, throbbing grouping, whose coherence coexists with energies and countercultures that exceed and confound it. An assemblage is, third, a web with an uneven topography: some of the points at which the trajectories of actants cross each other are more heavily trafficked than others, and thus power is not equally distributed across the assemblage. An assemblage is fourth, not governed by a central power: no one member has sufficient competence to fully determine the consequences of activities of the assemblage. (Bennett, 2005: 445)

And as DeLanda (2006: 253) argues, "In an assemblage components have a certain autonomy from the whole they compose, that is, they may be detached from it and plugged into another assemblage." Whilst #Acwri starts with a moderated discussion among a group of people using its hashtag over a limited period, tweets may be re-tweeted into members' own personal social networks, sometimes using other Twitter groups' hashtags (and therefore other discussion groups). And people can, and do, use the #Acwri hashtag for tweets which are about academic writing in between the

facilitated meetings. Like other Twitter-based discussion groups, #Acwri events often comprise parallel conversations at once, as multiple people can be tweet at the same time, or a particular tweet generates several lines of discussion.

But whilst the open, fluid, and largely democratic nature of #Acwri might feel positive, this raises the question of what it achieves, why it might be different from existing support networks, and how we could know. Reflecting on our experiencing of facilitating #Acwri to date we think that it may have four distinctive qualities. Firstly, it puts individually experienced - and potentially isolating experiences of writing (its frustrations, impasses, displacement activities and idiosyncratic rituals) into a social network, potentially reducing feelings of isolation. Secondly, it has the potential to normalise some of the challenges described above, which many writers experience, but rarely share with colleagues. Thirdly, it involves people reflecting on the practice of writing through writing (tweets) itself, rather than oral communication. We think that the act of writing about writing might help the creative process. Finally the network's events often move from discussions of challenges to the sharing of strategies, solutions and encouragement, which can motivate us to write (and keep writing), and know that the difficulty of writing is a normal experience.

At the heart of #Acwri is a belief in the value of academic writing. Whilst Twitter has frequently been criticised for its supposedly inane content and the limitations of its message-like communication, our experience of developing #Acwri suggests the value of drawing on social media to develop more traditional forms of writing.

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