

T2 Beaumaris 1 Friday 7 December 10.30 - 11.00

Transitions in Academic Writing Development (0642)

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Part 1- 150-word summary

This case study reports on a two-phase intervention for academic research writing development of master's clinical health care students. Firstly, to support dissertation text writing and secondly to repurpose texts for scholarly peer-review publication. There is little research that examines the process of cultural and psychological development or theorise the learning and transitions that take place in such contexts. Thus, the theoretical lenses of sociocultural theory and activity theory were used to design and analyse the interventions.

Narrative analysis of participant stories enabled mapping of individual social situations of development and the dialectical interplay between these activity settings which contain motives for writing development leading to rupture-transitions. Thematic analysis focused on the micro level of writing development. Three overarching themes emerged; firstly, tool use to achieve writing goals, secondly, the meaningfulness of mediation during the interventions and thirdly collaboration to overcome contradictions especially the peer-review process of academic journals.

Part 2- 1000-word paper

Introduction

This paper reports on an intervention designed to facilitate the transition from master's level dissertation writing towards a publishing goal within the context of a health and life sciences faculty in a UK university. The purpose of the study was to examine the cultural, historical, and social aspects which mediated the experiences and development of academic research writing as participants engaged in writing interventions alongside their participation as professional practitioners in clinical health practice. Firstly, this included a writing instructor-led academic research writing intervention for master's level students and secondly, a writing group intervention aimed at peer-review publication.

Health care disciplines have been historically, politically and culturally shaped towards professional status through higher education with an emphasis on evidence-based practice. This has led to an expectation to contribute to professional practice through publication (Bingham, 2014; Delaney 2014; Fowler 2016). However, it takes time to in-bed a level of scholarly writing expertise to make such transitions.

Academic research writing development within higher education for the health care disciplines indicates writing group interventions (Jackson, 2009; Rickard et al., 2009; Houfek et al., 2010; Ness et al., 2014). Reported outcomes focus on behaviour change or numbers of writing outputs. There is surprisingly little research that examines the process of cultural and psychological development or theorise the learning and transitions that take place.

Theoretical Perspective

This case study drew upon sociocultural theory and the analytical tools of activity theory to develop a framework of inquiry. Mercer (2013) argues from a sociocultural perspective that whilst there is much research to suggest that collaborative learning, benefits individual learning, there is not enough research focus with a social conception of the way people learn in specific contexts. Individual transitions differ and are affected by specific social and cultural contexts and experiences. Analysis therefore needs to focus both on the micro level of individual transitions and development, the meso level of practice and cultures of writing for academic audiences, and the macro, societal level of historical and current educational policy. Zittoun's (2006) portrayal of symbolic transitions and identity rupture engendered through changes in cultural contexts, relationships or interactions points to potential moments of crisis. From this perspective, transitions for adult writers can only be understood by considering the social and cultural situatedness of individual thought and action. This twin lens, on the individual and on the social practices in which they learn, calls for a non-dualist and dialectical account of learning to write over time for an academic audience.

The Vygotskian concept of the social situation of development (Vygotsky, 1987) and Wertch's (2007) concept of explicit mediation were to play a key role in the planning, observation and analysis of the activities. It was hypothesised that explicit mediation within the social situation of the writing group would raise questions of what Bazerman (2012) has described as concept formation within writing disciplines.

Methods

The study design was a longitudinal case study where the embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2014) were the two respective interventions. Data were collected through a review of writers' texts; related social artifacts; and semi-structured interviews with 18 participants. The research took place over a timeline of 18 months or until the participants had completed their writing goals. The analytic strategy addressed the three interrelated levels of the micro, meso and macro. Firstly, the respective narratives of participants to represent their experiences as refracted through their own prisms. This is with respect to their affective, personal, and social histories and includes the extent of engagement with the writing tasks and activities leading to personal writing goals. Secondly, coding of individual data using an inductive to deductive schema.

Findings

Narrative analysis

The narrative analysis of participants' stories revealed the heterogeneity of engagement with the interventions and the related experiences of dialectical interplay between clinical practice and academic activity settings. It was possible to map the social situation of development for each participant and hence examine the macro and meso levels of development. Furthermore, the use of symbolic resources to work on academic writing development rupture-transitions which were varied. For example, vertical transitions towards imagined futures as academic writing scholars and horizontal transitions to develop texts on topics that were meaningful for clinical practice, including the development of systematic review texts as cultural artefacts within healthcare.

Thematic and textual analysis

Thematic analysis focused upon the micro level of development and were triangulated with textual analysis. Three overarching themes emerged; firstly, the use of tools to achieve writing goals, secondly, the meaningfulness of tool use during the interventions and thirdly strategies used to overcome contradictions.

Participants could identify how tools introduced and used during the activities prompted them to internalise metadiscourse mechanisms within the academic writing process such as structure and voice. Sustained changes within texts over time were demonstrated by some including examples of how academic writing concepts

internalised during the intervention were externalised in other activity settings. Personal outcomes were also described in terms of individual struggles with concept formation in academic writing. The role of instruction or assistance from other peers or tutors was crucial in extending participant's zone of proximal development.

Participants who transitioned to the second intervention identified that the interventions helped to expose constrained writing voices in the disciplinary genre and this led to a sense of freedom to write, develop and experiment with texts. Conversely, the activity of sharing their own texts within the context of the group for feedback felt exposing. However, this exposure helped to anticipate sharing of writing with the wider disciplinary audience. Moreover, participants could identify how giving feedback developed the texts of others and reciprocally, their own. Dissertation students differentiated this feedback as feeling more negotiable than feedback received from academic tutors at an earlier stage of their writing development.

As the group transitioned further into submission of texts to disciplinary journals members used group collaboration as a resource when responding to reviewer's feedback. They conveyed a perception of the relevance of their writing for the progression of the discipline. There was a reciprocal recognition of peer writing trajectories at specific stages of development. An overall reflection on repurposing writing submitted for academic assessment into a journal text was much more complex than originally anticipated, however there was specific recognition of specific developments within personal writing evidenced with sequential examples of writing over time.

Conclusion

The genre of a dissertation text within the context was particularly challenging to grapple with. However, the interventions introduced social contexts, activities and tools to help overcome these challenges. As participants transitioned to new writing experiences, the collaborative nature of the activities enabled them to identify the constraints of writing in the discipline and how to encounter and deal with exposure of their writing to wider disciplinary audiences. Over time the interventions helped participants to reflect on their writing development and identify transformations within their texts. The research has implications for the way in which academic research

writing is developed and progressed within health care and contributes to an enhanced understanding of the pedagogy of writing.

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