

Being an academic: The changing writing practices of academics and how this influences professional identity (0111)

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This paper explores how changes in higher education are transforming academics' writing practices and sense of professional identity. We report on preliminary findings from an ESRC-funded research project which ethnographically explores the writing practices of academics in the organisational landscape of the modern university. The focus is on knowledge creating activities, many of which are exemplified in academics' writing practices (including research, teaching, and admin-related writing), and how these are increasingly shaped by agencies within and far beyond the academy.

Much has been written about writing and identity, but this has often focused on the student voice (see, for example, Ivanič, 1998; Hyland, 2002; Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2008). To date, only a few areas of research have dealt with the writing of academics themselves, even though writing is a key element of what it means to be an academic. Recent research that has been done in this area suggests that writing in the university workplace is changing in response to changes in higher education more widely. Lea and Stierer (2009) and Satchwell, Barton and Hamilton (2013), for example, investigated lecturers' everyday writing as professional practice, and found that academics now engage in a wide range of writing practices beyond what might be understood as 'scholarly writing'. With respect to the effect of changes in higher education more generally, Strathern (2000) and Deem et al. (2007) have written about how audit cultures are permeating academic life, while Knowles and Burrows (2014) have noted that the impact agenda is re-shaping the intellectual work and social relations of the university workplace. What is not known is how these changes are influencing the core academic activity of writing as a form of knowledge creation, and what the implications might be for academics' sense of identity.

It is likely that some of the changes outlined above may affect different disciplines in different ways, since writing practices vary across disciplines (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Hyland, 2004; Russell, 2002). However, Trowler (2013) has suggested that structural factors such as managerial practices and the way these are enacted in different locations may have as much influence on academics' everyday work as disciplinary culture. If policies such as the research excellence framework and the impact

agenda are to be a part of the academic landscape, it is important that we understand more about their implications for writing practices across a range of disciplines.

Drawing on the conceptual framework of literacy studies (Barton, 2007; Hamilton, 2012; Tusting, 2012), which sees academic writing as a set of situated practices embedded in social contexts, we set out to understand how such changes in higher education are shaping the writing practices and professional identities of academics. Working in three different disciplines across three contrasting HE institutions, we conducted go-along interviews (Garcia et al., 2012), 'technobiographic' accounts (Page et al., 2014) and ethnographic observations of work spaces and departmental environments in order to better understand academics' writing practices in the domains of research, teaching, administration and impact. These data were analysed with the aid of ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software. Specific literacy practices, events and texts were coded in order to identify which were common across the data set.

Preliminary findings indicate that, despite the increasing range of writing genres academics are required to engage in, the respondents still viewed scholarly writing as central to their professional identity, tending to foreground this in our discussions. What they describe, variously, as "research writing" or "intellectual writing" involves greater emotional as well as cognitive investment than writing done for administrative or promotional purposes. They derive considerable pleasure from this core writing, describing it in terms of "crafting" a piece of work, "telling a story" and "creating an independent being".

Despite the contribution that scholarly writing made to the respondents' sense of identity as academics, they sometimes struggled with pressures relating to both time and managerial practices which threatened to erode their sense of autonomy. Writing could be "pushed to the corners" due to competing demands on their time and attention. Furthermore, pressure to publish in a narrow range of high-ranking journals also led some respondents to publish beyond their own discipline, which they saw as undermining the status of the discipline as a whole.

The paper will present these results in more detail, drawing primarily on thematic analysis of the interview data to identify relationships between changes in academic writing practices and people's accounts of their academic identities. The implications of these changes for our understanding of what counts as knowledge creation and how this might impact on academics are discussed.

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