

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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A Visual Study of an Academic Writing Skills Workshop – an Example set in Brazil

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**Research Domain:** Academic practice ,work, careers and cultures (AP)

**Abstract:** Although there is growing research on teaching academic writing skills, little is situated in contexts of the Global South: our understanding of such practices is impoverished in consequence.

Using a visual study of writing workshops delivered in two Brazilian universities, this paper presents an arts-based sociomaterial analysis-in-progress. Specifically, through researcher-created drawings the analysis will explore how workshop practices are shaped by material, sensory and political contexts of ‘being published’ in Brazil, and it shows what these practices look like. At first glance these practices might *appear* familiar but, critically for what will be the mid-point of analysis, the presentation will ask the following: to what extent is appearance a reflection of my own northernised gaze? To what extent can researcher-created drawings illuminate the complexity of teaching practices in an unfamiliar context? And how might prickly ethical issues of visual research in higher education settings be resolved?

**Paper:**

### Introduction

Being published in high-ranking journals is a matter of reputation and career progression for academics irrespective of discipline and geographic location. Therefore, learning to write academically and learning to navigate the vagaries of academic publishing are core skills for academics, particularly at this present time when research funding is allocated according to the quality of academic outputs (Auranen and Nieminen, 2010; Hicks, 2012).

Current research on teaching academic writing practices tells us they are often theorised through a transmission model of learning and teaching. Such models reinforce the idea that the learning of academic writing practices is the result of acquiring information and skills, and fails to take into account the significance of materials, place and performance in shaping these practices (Fenwick, Edwards and Sawchuck, 2011). It is important to know what these practices are and what they look like in order that they can be better understood and better taught.

## Academic Publishing in Brazil

Academic publishing in Brazil varies according to discipline but for the most part Brazilian journals are published in Portuguese, and also in Spanish. Unlike the UK REF where individual journal articles are assessed for quality, in Brazil it is the journal that is afforded a rating by Qualis - a system used by the agency CAPES (Coordenação de Pessoal de Nivel Superior) to evaluate 'the quality of intellectual production. Being published in a high-ranking Qualis journal is taken as evidence of quality for the individual submission. It is a challenge for Brazilian academics to have their articles accepted for international journals published in English in the global north. The consequences of this are two-fold. First, innovative research from Brazil escapes the attention of the global academic community and cannot interrupt dominant discourses in their respective fields. Second, Brazilian academics are unlikely to progress their careers in an international job market that favours those who have published in English with international peer-reviewed journals, and who have secured significant grant funding (often) through international collaborative research proposals. Initiatives such as the British Academy Writing Workshops are designed to counteract these consequences and it was one such [funded project](#) that created the opportunity for this visual study.

## The teaching of academic writing practices in Brazil

The university system of Brazil is divided amongst state, federal and privately funded universities. The majority of academics hold heavy teaching commitments, few are tenured and many undertake their doctoral studies whilst teaching (Santos and Okazaki, 2016). Furthermore, teaching writing practices for academic publications and peer-review is contextualised largely within Portuguese speaking journal communities. Brazilian academics have few opportunities to learn the idiosyncrasies of writing for publications of the Global North – the main conduit for international career progression and research engagement.

## The study aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to make visible the material practices of an academic writing workshop; and to explore the ways in which these things practices construct the teaching of academic writing skills. The study focused solely on what could be observed and did not include the experiences of participants. The key objectives were to undertake a visual survey of the bodies, objects, tools, technologies and settings (i.e. sociomaterial) of an academic writing workshop; and to undertake an analysis of the visual data set (digital photographs) through researcher-created drawings.

## Visual study design (photographs and researcher reflective writing)

Broadly ethnographic, the study used participant observation through digital photography to document actions (early career academics) and objects during a specific writing session (agreed in advance with the participants); and used reflective journaling to document the researcher's reflexive fieldnotes and experiences. The data set comprises a total of 219 photographs and written reflexive fieldnotes.

Data was collected at two workshop locations: Federal University of Minas Gerais in the coastal city of Fortaleza, north-east Brazil; and the Federal University of Ceara in Belo Horizonte, Brazil's third largest city. Participants were 33 early career academics from across state and privately funded universities

in Brazil: 11 female and 10 male in Fortaleza; and 9 female and 4 male in Belo-Horizonte.

Analysis (ongoing) takes the form of an art-based sociomaterial account of the objects and actions depicted. The detail of this approach is described in Michael (2018). The findings will be theorised through Gherardi's (2001) knowing-in-practice lens and presented as a series of drawings.

The visual nature of the study presented certain ethical considerations overcome by a fieldwork protocol and image-by-image consent from participants (who each agreed to relinquish anonymity).

## Art-based analysis using drawing – how this works

Based on Sullivan's (2008) analytic method 'create to critique', the drawing language of lines, shapes and composition can be used to analyse relations between bodies, objects, tools, technologies and settings (otherwise described as the sociomaterial). Whilst still flawed by the northernised perceptions of eye and hand, these analytic drawings will be open to reinterpretation from different cultural standpoints – freeing the findings from fixed meanings and challenging a priori assumptions of what constitutes practices.

## Anticipating Analysis



Digital

photographs selected for analysis [Image credit: author]

By way of example, these three digital photographs are selected for analysis because they are representative of the ways in which bodies, objects, tools, technologies and settings (i.e. the sociomaterial) repeated visually across the 192 visual data set of photographs. From these, and others, I intend to create a series of line drawings and bring these into dialogue with Gherardi's concept of knowing-in-practice. This dialogue with drawings will form the basis of the presentation to SRHE 2019

## Discussion and Moving forward – what might the drawings point to?

The aim of the study was to explore what the teaching of academic writing practices looks like in Brazil. Given that the author is 'looking' from a UK perspective it is hardly surprising that this visual survey of objects and activities tells us that the teaching of academic writing skills in Brazil looks very much like the teaching of academic writing skills. However, at the time of writing, I suggest that the drawings may point to the complexity of social, material and political interplay in the construction of teaching practices in Higher Education and affirm that teaching is shaped by this interplay and cannot be separated from it. Furthermore, I suggest that as the knowledge of these teaching practices is

constructed amidst the doing of them (i.e. through the knowing-in-practice), then it is impossible to fully know these practices in advance. Thus, the drawings present a way of recognising the practices whilst being in the midst of them. The visual nature of the findings might challenge long-held beliefs in what constitutes analysis and raise questions about drawing as a position of critique, a political stance in challenge of conventional qualitative approaches to the study of learning and teaching in higher education.

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