

CHAPTER 10

WRITING DEVELOPMENT, CO-TEACHING AND ACADEMIC LITERACIES: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS

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Writing can be a means of knowing and being in the world. That kind of writing requires self-examination, self-awareness, consciousness of the process of writing and reading.

– John Edgar Wideman, Preface to the 2nd edition of *Brothers and Keepers*.

ENTERING THE SPACE

Following the signs, trying to navigate the sections and subsections of the Mile End hospital, a collection of workaday modernist and Victorian sanatorium architectures, I find the back stairs to the Sports Medicine Clinical Assessment Service. At the end of a blue and magnolia corridor of closed doors, each with nameplate and title, are two large notice boards with rows of journal articles pinned up in



Figure 10.1: Photo 1. © J. Ingle, 2012

plastic pockets, five across, three down. On one side a lectern facing the wall holds a thick file of journal articles. Flicking through, the thud of each article and weight of research and publication.



Figure 10.2: Photo 2. © J. Ingle, 2012

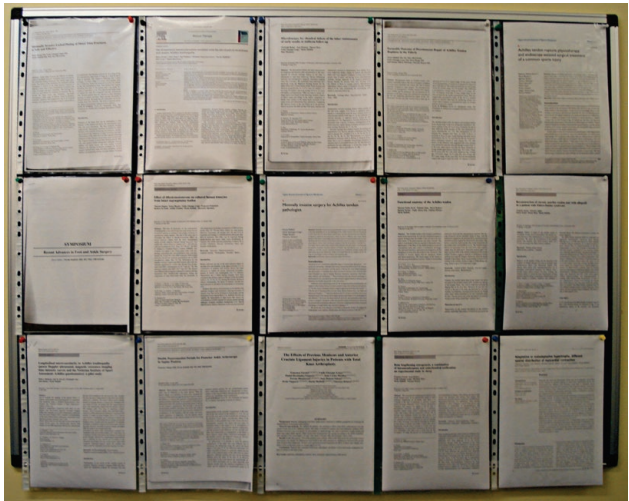


Figure 10.3: Photo 3. © J. Ingle, 2012

A doorway leads into a large open area in drab NHS (National Health Service) colors. Along the walls are treatment beds covered in industrial blue plastic, head-shaped holes where the pillow would normally go. Femurs and fragments of skeletons lie on the bed, the disjecta membra of the medical subject ready for treatment and learning. The

theme continues in the classroom, a disarticulated skeleton without limbs asleep on the desk, a loose foot lying by its head, with painted markings, caveman-like. The skull lies with its cheek on the desk, the cranium to one side, a vanitas without clock or book.



Figure 10.4: Photo 4. © J. Ingle, 2012



Figure 10.5: Photo 5. © J. Ingle, 2012

This is a familiar environment to medical students: by their third or fourth year they will have spent plenty of time in and around hospitals and clinics. To the outsider it is striking: traces of authority, impersonal fragments of human anatomy ...



Figure 10.6: Photo 6. © J. Ingle, 2012

IDENTIFYING THE SPACE

Each year more than twenty Bachelor of Medicine students from the Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry (Queen Mary University of London) and elsewhere choose to intercalate (insert) an extra year of study in the field of Sports and Exercise Medicine to qualify for a BSc (Hons). This chapter discusses the work of designing and co-teaching a series of writing workshops that prepare students to write a 6,000-word research project. The project is their most significant piece of assessed coursework, and is intended (with guidance from the Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine (CSEM) tutors) to reach a standard suitable for publication in the British Journal of Sports Medicine (BJSM) or as a conference paper.

If disciplinary writing is bound to the social practices in which it is realized (Romy Clark & Roz Ivanič, 1997; Theresa Lillis & Mary Scott, 2007), then to begin to grasp the ways power and identity inform and maintain such practices may help us discover more about the character of writers and their writing. Our question in designing the workshops was whether exploring aspects of the ways power and identity are manifest within the sports and exercise medicine discipline would help students to position themselves more effectively as researchers and writers. Our response drew on the critical frame of Academic Literacies (Mary Lea & Brian Street, 1998; Lillis & Scott, 2007), in particular its “emphasis on dialogic

methodologies” (Lillis & Scott, 2007, p. 11) and “a transformative stance” (ibid., p. 12). What we set out to develop was a small scale exploratory case study in which co-teaching, reflections and discussions fed into subsequent teaching and reflections. In putting together the workshops we designed a number of activities to open up dialogue and to foreground questions of disciplinary knowledge construction, identity and power that would perhaps enable students and teachers to explore, and in some cases question, some of the conventions and practices around research writing in medicine.

SHARING THE SPACE

Our collaboration with the CSEM began in 2006, in response to concerns raised by staff and external examiners about a marked disparity between the ability of the students to articulate ideas orally and in writing. From the outset, the Inter-calated BSc (iBSc) Course Lead was closely involved in the design of the syllabus, workshops and materials, and keen to co-teach the sessions. The four writing workshops are now co-taught by the Research Supervisor¹ (henceforth referred to as RS) from the CSEM and a member of Thinking Writing, a staff-facing curriculum and writing development initiative at Queen Mary University of London (<http://www.thinkingwriting.qmul.ac.uk/>). There has been an increasing commitment by CSEM to this work: the workshops are now fully integrated into the module design and its assessment structure, whereas for the first five years of our collaboration they were additional to its core content. In addition, a three day semi-structured writing retreat that we piloted and co-facilitated in 2010 has now been permanently incorporated into the programme, as a further point of transition for those students who are keen to publish their projects.

What we hope the presence of a disciplinary tutor working with a writing specialist signals to students is that research writing is not a prosthesis (Elaine Showalter & Anne Griffin, 2000) or “skill” they can attach to themselves, but is inseparable from the ways in which knowledge is constructed and represented in a discipline (Charles Bazerman, 1981; Mary Lea, 2004; Jonathan Monroe, 2003). As such, this work is loosely grounded in the Writing in the Disciplines approaches to writing development (Monroe, 2003, 2007; David Russell, 2002). More broadly, it reflects a growing consensus within areas of the work around writing in higher education about the “need for writing development, wherever possible, to be embedded within disciplinary teaching, and taught and supported by disciplinary teachers, precisely because of a recognition that writing and thinking are, or should be, integral processes” (Sally Mitchell, 2010, p. 136).

The outlines and syllabus Julian was working with could be characterized as encompassing a range of approaches and methodologies from Roz Ivanič’s “Discourses of Writing” framework for describing writing in higher education (2004, p.

255). The activities included, for example, student reflections on their writing and reading processes (a process approach), and, following John Swales and Christine Feak (2004), looking at the moves, features and language in systematic reviews and research papers from the BJSM (a genre approach). Many of the activities used could be broadly characterized as falling within the domain of “academic socialization” (Lea & Street, 1998; Lillis, 2001). And while there was no problem with the course, since the potential for publication was very important to students and the CSEM, we began to feel it was worth trying to shift the approach and broaden the range of activities in order to help students negotiate and understand better their transition into research publication, thus enabling a more “comprehensive approach to the teaching of writing” (Ivanič, 2004, p. 241). Our co-teaching approach enabled disciplinary staff and writing tutors to open up a dialogue, bringing their specific understandings *in situ* to the tasks being written, a dialogue the students were very much at the centre of. Simply put, we wanted to “make space for talk” (Lillis, 2001, p. 133).

The co-authors occupied the space in different ways: Julian, from Thinking Writing, had the coordinating role and co-taught the sessions with the CSEM RS, but he also had the benefit of preparing and reflecting on the sessions with Nadya, also a member of the Thinking Writing team at the time, which helped re-articulate the teaching and brought an external voice when interviewing the tutors retrospectively.

TRANSFORMING THE SPACE

To explore more general questions about writing and knowledge construction, and to expand the range of writing students might use, freewriting activities were designed that would prompt discussions about broader aspects of the discipline. One example was a slightly contentious statement as a prompt: “Most medical research, and therefore writing, is about confirming and enlarging existing beliefs, not in developing new ones.”

Here are extracts from two freewrites:

To an extent, medical research is about confirming existing beliefs, but if this were the case, no truly groundbreaking discoveries would be made. A lot of great scientific writing flies [?] against the current dogma. I feel this is the case because to confirm what is already known is futile and, in some regard, a vanity project. But to write of something truly new, that falls outside our belief system but happens to be true, is where real progress is made within the discipline.

... ethics and money/finance define modern medicine esp in the UK and with the NHS. Research will usually take place in fields

where finance is available. eg. A previous project on this course was looking at hamstring activation + EMG. [My] the person doing the study first wanted to look at kicking in taekwondo, but then was told by his supervisor to look at running/football because that's where the money is.

Although each student had their own take on the statement, most showed a concern with how this disciplinary community operates. In the second extract, the implication is that what gets research funding often has to conform to internal and external pressures; while at the same time it illustrates a “consciousness [of] the social context of writing [and] the nature of the discourse community they are working in ...” (Clark & Ivanič, 1997, p. 233). What also came out of the discussions after the freewriting was how clinical practice changes in response to new insights derived from research, and the significance of this nexus of research, writing and practice.

For students as emergent researchers, we considered that it was particularly relevant to make more visible “the centrality of identity and identification” and “the impact of power relations on student writing,” following Lillis and Scott (2007, p. 12). Through discussion and reflection, we hoped to explore the multiple identities of these students (novice academic writers, novice researchers trying to achieve “legitimate peripheral participation” (Eitienne Wenger, 2008, p. 100), supervisees, future medical practitioners, possibly future academics, etc.) and how these identities may shape the way in which students engage with their writing.

There is no room to breathe or express yourself. You could say this is typical of medicine as a whole subject, not just research.
(A student's freewrite).

This extract demonstrates the tension between the desire for self-expression and the disciplinary and institutional constraints that one has to negotiate. A further example of how such tensions and power relations manifest themselves emerged from a discussion about author order in a journal article the students had been reading—they were keen to question the status of each author and what their position in the list might mean. In response, the RS explained that in medical sciences, the author order is not linear: first and last authors carry most weight; usually, the first has done most of the work and the last is the most important in terms of status, funding grants, and publications (but may often contribute very little to the actual writing apart from signing it off). How work was allocated and who came next in the pecking order of second and third authors were questions of debate and often compromise.

Although initially unaware of the hierarchy of author order, the students already had some sense of their identity as researchers and the difficulties of negoti-

ating their status within this research community. There was a discussion of their concerns about the role of student researcher being abused, for example, that they could be used as free (and unacknowledged) labour on research projects. The RS explained that they had to “earn their spurs” or “serve their time” in the research community in order to move towards the status of last author. Interestingly, both metaphors come from two tightly structured and very hierarchical institutions—the army and the prison system.

Once the students’ awareness of the significance of author order had been raised, the presence of a struggle with their place in the research community was evident in subsequent aspects of the course. In a presentation by a journal editor, one of the students followed up a point about lack of recognition of their role because of being shifted to third author in the research project. What emerged was a conflict of interests between the students, who needed to be first or second authors to get extra points in their Foundation Programme process,² which would improve their chances of employment, and their supervisors, who also needed to be in poll position to maintain their academic careers as researchers and ensure they met appraisal and national evaluation requirements for sufficient publications (for the system used in UK context see <http://www.ref.ac.uk>).

MAKING “SPACE FOR TALK”

By opening up their classroom, there was in one sense a break with the tradition of writing and researcher instruction in the CSEM. Rather than an “add on” approach or the induction from within the discipline itself, the co-teaching explicitly set out to open up and maintain dialogue among all participants, thus transforming the teaching space itself and making the students more open to talk and engage.

NY: Did you notice anything specific about how students reacted to two tutors teaching them?

JI: To me, certainly at university level, it seems to unsettle that normal dynamic—in a good way.

RS: It makes it a bit less formal I think, which is important as well. Rather than just being talked at, they are more likely to engage if there’s two people at the front talking. They are more likely to also talk themselves, as opposed to if there’s just one they don’t want to be the second person talking. ... That drew a lot of interaction from them.

JI: That’s right, I think it pulls them in.

In feedback, students commented on the value of having a different perspec-

tive on writing, perhaps because it may help them position their own disciplinary writing as one of many types of research writing and made the mystery around academic writing less mysterious (Lillis, 2001).

There was also a visible transformation for the tutors involved. The RS had previously learned the disciplinary conventions of research writing through “osmosis” (Lillis, 2001, p. 54) and the complex socialization that takes place in writing one’s doctorate. While academics tend to have a tacit understanding of how knowledge is articulated in their discipline, they do not always “know that they have this rhetorical knowledge and cannot readily explain this to others” (Joan Turner, 2011, p. 434). The writing sessions helped the RS to make this tacit knowledge explicit to himself and the students. The writing tutor, in turn, gained considerable insight into not just the way scientific knowledge is represented in writing, but also the nature of the discipline and science in general. In response to Nadya’s question about the benefits of co-teaching, the following exchange exemplifies some of the insights for both co-tutors:

RS: A lot of the writing processes you go through and all the writing aspects ... although I may have had some of the skills I wasn’t aware of the skills I did have, so in terms of transferring that to teaching I didn’t know what I’d needed to try and teach, but having Julian come in from a completely different world had helped to put perspective on that for me ...

Jl: For me what it’s been is the process of learning about scientific writing, or writing for this very specific journal actually ... but also a little bit about the broader discipline and how research methods are used, and how you go about analyzing data and things like that It has undermined illusions or preconceptions that I had about science writing

NY: Could you elaborate on that?

Jl: [For me] ... science is always something that was set in stone, and couldn’t be questioned, and is utterly rigorous ... but what was happening was very exploratory and tentative and ... this is the best possible hypothesis for this particular context, so I saw it as much more context-bound There wasn’t nearly as much certainty that I assumed existed in the sciences and that was purely my preconception of scientific thinking.

These shifts in the thinking of the tutors also became manifest in their teaching practices. There was a trajectory along which tutors inched into each other’s disciplinary spaces as a result of sharing the space. Through these dialogic en-

counters, they became briefly at home in each other's disciplinary languages. For example, Julian felt more able to join in critiques of experimental methodologies when looking at systematic reviews of specialist areas of sports medicine, while the RS felt comfortable discussing linguistic features such as redundant language when, in a whole class activity, the students applied it to one of the RS's published abstracts.

LEAVING THE SPACE

Do the practices, insights and changes described reflect Lillis and Scott's claim for "the explicit transformational interest that is at the core of academic literacies work" (2007, p. 23)? For these students, the fact of participating in these writing workshops may have led to a transformation in their understanding in its most basic sense of learning something they did not know, which may be no different from other learning situations. One could argue, therefore, that what we have done has less to do with the "transformational approach" (ibid., p. 13) of Academic Literacies but more about the transformative nature of learning. Similarly, the insights gained by the co-teachers from the shared experience of teaching the students were perhaps no different from those of any practitioner given the opportunity to reflect on their teaching.

While these reservations may be valid, we maintain that aspects of this work are more than this and go part of the way towards a transformative approach by locating the conventions of medical science in relation to contested traditions of knowledge making. We would therefore suggest that the "complex insider knowledge" (Ivanič, 1998, p. 344) that is required of these students to negotiate the two very different social practices of writing for assessment versus writing for publication is fostered through this approach to co-teaching. Our discussions and the small-scale but overt focus on power, identity and epistemology may have helped clarify and make explicit some of the "values, beliefs and practices" (ibid.) within this sub-discipline. Expanding the range of textual practices (and, possibly, ways of making meaning (Lillis & Scott, 2007)) that students engaged in has, we hope, helped them refine their understanding of the discipline and their positions within it. Through discussing the opportunities for our pedagogical practice that an Academic Literacies framework offers, and by reflecting on some of its limitations, we have hoped to make a contribution to current debates on the relationship between Academic Literacies theory and practice. In particular, co-curricular design, the use of co-teaching and the potentially transformative nature of the discussions that took place are areas that offer some directions in further exploration of the "design" potential of Academic Literacies.

RE-ENTERING THE SPACE

The writing work described here started from the premise that opening up and foregrounding questions about knowledge, meaning making, power, and identity would lead to insight for both teachers and students, allowing them to position themselves as writers and researchers in a more conscious way, and to become more aware of how their discipline works and how their current and emergent identities may be mapped onto the disciplinary canvas.

We hope that this work will allow those involved (students, disciplinary teachers and writing developers) to re-enter and locate themselves in the disciplinary (and also institutional/departmental/academic) spaces in a slightly different way—with enriched insight and deepened understanding of the complexity and multifaceted nature of “knowing and being” in the academic world. Returning to Wideman’s quote in the epigraph to this chapter, then, we could perhaps transform and extend it to writing in academia in the following way:

Academic writing can be a means of acquiring, developing and demonstrating disciplinary knowledge, as well as experiencing and having presence in the academic world. This kind of writing requires examination of the multiple identities that one has to negotiate in the process of producing a piece of academic writing, awareness of how these identities interact with wider structures and relations existing in academia and beyond, and consciousness of the processes and practices surrounding the production, transmission and use of academic texts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Dylan Morrissey, Christian Barton and the staff from the Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine, for the warmth of their welcome and the insights and expertise they have shared. We would also like to thank Sally Mitchell (without whom this work would not have been possible) for her thoughtful, patient readings and discussions.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that the Research Supervisor post in CSEM is usually a six-month, fixed-term contract aimed at a practicing physiotherapist who has recently completed his or her PhD. This, therefore, entails forming a new collaboration each year with the appointed co-teacher(s).

2. As Foundation Doctors in the final two years of their medical degree, students can accrue points for research publications.

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