Disciplines of Writing in Educational Research

ARTICLES

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Academic writing in higher education
The ubiquity of writing skills
A new tool for independent learning
What is the question?
Collaborative writing
Writing book proposals
Resilient adult learning
Work-based learning
It’s all change at BERA…

In truth it’s all change everywhere, and most of it is not very welcome! However, the story at BERA is much more positive and I would like to take this opportunity to set out the various changes that are underway. These changes herald a new way of doing our business – through standing committees – and a new administrative arrangement to support the committees.

But first the background. The Association’s activities have expanded considerably under the leadership and management of recent presidents, officers and the CEO. However, its decision-making and operational activities have for some years been funnelled through relatively infrequent Executive Council meetings. Analysis of the situation suggested that logjams and delays had become almost systematic. There was a need to find a more effective way to ensure that business was undertaken in a timely and efficient manner. One approach, used by many successful associations, was for BERA to have a standing committee structure that ensures the implementation of work programmes. Such a model would also enable the Council to regain its governing and strategic roles.

Four standing committees have therefore been constituted, partly with members of Council and partly with ‘ordinary’ (i.e. non-Council) members. This is a deliberate policy initiative to ensure greater representation of our members’ views. And to accomplish this goal, we have ensured that all members of the Association were canvassed for expressions of interest.

The four standing committees are:

- General Purposes Committee (GPC)
- Membership and Engagement Committee (MEC)
- Events and Networking Committee (ENC)
- Academic Publications Committee (APC)

The General Purposes Committee comprises the officers and the chairs of the standing committees. Its remit, broadly speaking, is to oversee the operational activities of the Association. The remits of the other committees are self-evident but more detailed descriptions and memberships of all of the committees are available on the website: www.bera.ac.uk

Even though this new structure has been the subject of much discussion, we are fairly sure that it will need to be tweaked as it begins to roll out. It went into operation in early September and will be subject to a review at the end of the academic year.

contents
Another challenge faced by the Association was to find a better way to support the activities of the committees. In the ‘old’ model, much of the actual work was carried out by just one person (the CEO, Jeremy Hoad) with the support of contracted administrative services from an association management company. The services provided were of a fixed type, broadly covering secretariat, finance and membership support. These services were subject to an hourly-rated basis and contractual agreement. Any ad hoc or non-routine activities, e.g. nominations to HEFCE’s REF panels, could be managed through the arrangement but had to be negotiated on a case-by-case basis. It therefore proved difficult to provide a responsive, adaptable and proactive administrative support system – something that is absolutely necessary for the new committee structure.

Council also recognised the burden this situation placed on the CEO and identified an urgent need to provide better support for both the CEO and BERA’s very active volunteers including the Council and other committee members. The Officers group and Council gave considerable thought to how these administrative problems might be remedied and explored the experience and arrangements of other organisations similar to BERA. These included UCET, the College of Teachers, the British Psychological Society, the Political Studies Association and the Academy of Social Sciences – all characterised by having full-time administrative staff and their own (usually rented) accommodation. In this latter respect, BERA did have an accommodation address but did not have physical accommodation.

The outcome of the deliberations and discussions over the last year was to opt for an entirely new administrative support system for the Association. The decision was taken to constitute a BERA office with staff and resources to support our various activities. These members of staff will effectively be our ‘front office’ team, providing a friendly and knowledgeable response to members’ and non-members’ requests in relation to meetings, publications, events and so on. Working under the line management of the CEO, their roles will also include such responsibilities as management of the membership database, subscription handling, processing expense claims, maintaining the BERA website and administering committees.

So where will our office be? Watch this space! Within the next couple of months we hope to emulate UCET and take up a very generous offer of accommodation and other services from the Institute of Education in London. The office will have our name on the door and we will have a prime central location for our business. We will operate independently of the Institute, of course. However, we very much expect that our close proximity to the Institute, indisputably one of the world’s foremost centres of excellence in educational research, will present many opportunities for potential synergies.

John Gardner
Queen’s University, Belfast

21 awards
Dissertation award: Resilient adult learning
Practitioner award: Work-based learning

25 conference
BERA 2010 – some thoughts
BERA 2011
### BERA Executive Council 2010–11

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<td>John Gardner</td>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>Mary James</td>
<td>2014</td>
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<td>Colin Rogers</td>
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<td>Hilary Burgess</td>
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### Academy of Social Science Nominations

Up to three nominations to membership of the Academy of Social Sciences are available to BERA for the next round of nominations in December 2010. Full details (including nomination forms and guidance) will be distributed by email to all BERA members. The deadline for receipt of completed forms by the BERA Office will be 3rd December 2010.

*The paramount requirement for nomination is that an individual has made a significant contribution to Social Science and its promotion.* This contribution can be in any area, discipline or inter-disciplinary social science and can include research, teaching, professional practice, consultancy and the promotion and dissemination of social science knowledge.

Further information is available on the BERA website [www.bera.ac.uk](http://www.bera.ac.uk)
News from BERJ

*The British Educational Research Journal* has significantly improved its two year impact factor over the past year. The impact factor is calculated from the number of citations to items published in the previous year. The 2009 impact factor is 1.035, rising from 0.791 in 2008. This places the journal 40th out of 139 in the Education and Educational Research Category of the current Social Sciences Citation Index, up from 46th out of 113 in 2008. It is one of very few UK-based journals in the top 50.

The new *BERJ* editorial team has been appointed to take over in 2011 for three years. Two members of the existing team, Viv Baumfield and Ian Menter from the University of Glasgow, are part of the new team. They will be joined by Joanne Hughes and Ruth Leitch from Queen’s University, Belfast and by Hilary Cremin and Peter Gronn from the University of Cambridge.

BERA to host ECER 2014

BERA is pleased to announce that ECER 2014 will be held at the Institute of Education, London from Monday 22nd September 2014 to Friday 26th September 2014. The Pre-conference will be held on Monday and Tuesday (22nd and 23rd). There will be an overlap on the Tuesday, with the Main conference starting on Tuesday (23rd) and ending on Friday (26th).

We are looking forward to hosting ECER, as the last time ECER was held in England was at Bath in 1995. ECER 2000 was held in Edinburgh.

BERA 2014 is scheduled to be held from Tuesday 2nd to Thursday 4th September 2014. The venue will be announced in due course.

Put these dates in your diary as September 2014 should prove to be an exciting period. Further details will be provided nearer the time.

Ideas and suggestions for ECER 2014 are welcome from BERA members.

Danny Durant (Chair)
Some bad news and some good news…
for educational research in the wake of the Comprehensive Spending Review

Mary James, BERA Vice President, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Education

Unsurprisingly, there has been a flurry of activity around the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) on 20th October 2010. The term of the CSR is four years so its impact will be felt for some time. Particularly relevant to the social sciences was a seminar on the REF convened by HEFCE on 23rd September, and two meetings with the learned societies and subject associations on 27th October, one convened by ESRC and the other by the British Academy (BA).

The discussions in all of these overlapped, and some of the same speakers contributed, so the following is my attempt, as BERA representative at these meetings, to summarise some of the points of particular interest to educational researchers.

Two major themes featured in these discussions: the prospects for funding after the CSR; and the REF, especially with reference to assessment of impact.

Prospects for funding
At the BA meeting the speeches of Steve Smith (President, UUK), David Sweeney (HEFCE Director, Research, Innovation and Skills), Rick Rylance (Chief Executive, AHRC) and Paul Boyle (Chief Executive, ESRC) can only be described as impassioned. The clear message was that these are uncertain times for social science research and we need to fight for the future of our disciplines. Not all the news is bad but we must beware of shooting ourselves in the foot. David Sweeney was unequivocal, as one might perhaps expect, considering that HEFCE is in the frontline. He counselled us ‘not to talk in public about jobs for academics, but to talk about how we will repay the confidence the public places in universities’. Justifying high fees and public funding in terms of high quality teaching, employability skills and social and economic impact of research might seem ‘all difficult utilitarian stuff’ but, ‘Do we want to pluck defeat from the jaws of victory by loose talk?’ Continuing the military metaphor he urged us to beat the drum for the humanities and social sciences because the scientists, through concerted effort, have grabbed the agenda and safeguarded their research and teaching. Steve Smith argued that the science budget was protected because Government was persuaded by the logic that a cut would harm economic growth; the impact story will be crucial for the humanities and social sciences too. The cost, though, will be more research concentration. We ought also to be aware that efficiency savings are likely to push more money to STEM subjects which could threaten funding to the ESRC, and that the current balance of funding between research councils and QR could change. Another strong message, therefore, was that we should argue hard to keep the current distribution as it stands.

What is clear is that the sector will be required to yield 33% – 40% efficiency gains over the CSR period. Rick Rylance pointed out that David Willetts and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (particularly the team under Andrew Smith) are ‘our friends in this’. David Willetts has defended a wide definition of valued research beyond just the STEM subjects; after all, the humanities and social sciences have provided a valued pool of recruits to parliament, the civil service, the justice system and journalism. However, savings need to be made. Some of these may come from research council staffing, but in order to maintain the health of the whole research base, not just individual disciplines, some key strategic issues need to be considered. Rick Rylance identified seven:
1. The impact agenda will not go away and we need to develop a strategic approach to knowledge exchange.
2. The impulse to funding concentration in certain areas raises an issue about the need for collaborative development at regional level.
3. Collaboration between universities, departments, disciplines and agencies will be a prominent theme in the next three years.
4. Funding challenges should act as a stimulus to interdisciplinary work.
5. Attention will need to be made to overlaps in provision with a greater need to integrate what is provided e.g. funders would benefit by mapping and co-ordinating provision across research careers.
6. There is need for ‘demand management’ so that less time is wasted by research council staff on dealing with failing bids. For example, the success rate of bids to ESRC is 10-15%. Many bids are submitted before they are ready, and some submissions are incentivised by HEIs rewarding staff for just submitting a bid. It was felt that such incentives must stop although it was not felt appropriate to introduce the ‘three strikes and you are out’ policy adopted by the EPSRC – social scientists are less likely to keep on submitting failing bids so threshold criteria to stop researchers applying were thought to be unnecessary.
7. The ‘second generation of researchers’ problem persists i.e. how to develop and sustain capacity beyond the current senior generation and before the flourishing generation of early career researchers come to seniority.

The ESRC is already in ‘hair-shirt mode’ – there were no name badges and no coffee at its own meeting with learned societies. However, it is attempting to balance change with continuity in the context of the CSR. Under the new Chief Executive, Paul Boyle, it has established a new structure and a new peer review college, and is pushing ahead with its new emphasis (in bids, reports and evaluations) on economic and social impact. However it reiterates its enduring values of quality, impact and independence of which ‘quality’ is the foremost. Its partnership approach has leveraged £25m from external sources of funds, focusing on the business sector.

Most encouraging perhaps, is ESRCs continuing commitment to core data infrastructure, notably the Economic and Social Data Service, the Birth Cohort Studies, and the British Household Panel Study (now called the Understanding Society Study). Moreover, ESRC is trying to link these studies to administrative data to ensure optimal use, although collaborations with the relevant agencies are challenging. There is also a commitment to the continued development of methods, especially: quantitative methods; innovatory methods e.g. using digital technologies; and mixed methods.

Postgraduate training will be concentrated in fewer institutions and a greater proportion will be in priority areas. An announcement about which institutions will be funded for high quality doctoral training courses will be made early in 2011. ‘A time of austerity is not a time for modest, incremental research’ and the ESRC wants to push the bounds of innovation in research by encouraging bold, ambitious proposals. It hopes that the new Peer Review College, of 1800 UK academics, 50 overseas and 250 user members, will help. Interdisciplinary, within and beyond the social sciences, and international dimensions, to meet global challenges, are also encouraged. To this end, ESRC links with all six RCUK programmes, and European funders.

Overall ESRC funding has been protected in cash terms; there will be a cut in real terms but not such a big cut as had been feared. However, it is having to consider cuts to capital spend (up to 40%) and whether it needs to move money from grants to protect the data infrastructure. The 33% of administration cuts it has been asked to consider could affect the jobs of 130-150 staff, hence the need to slow down the submission, and processing, of unsuccessful bids (see above). One strategy under consideration is that there should be no resubmission of an unsuccessful bid unless specifically invited.

It is most likely that ESRC will expect researchers to focus on the seven broad challenges that it has identified (see http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/strategicplan/challenges/). There will be fewer competitions; for instance, large grants and centre competitions will probably merge. Special provision for early career researchers will be made, but not necessarily through the previous ‘small grants’, which might disappear. Mid-career fellowships are also likely to go.

There will almost certainly be a sharper focus on three of the strategic priorities from the seven challenges, although the response mode will still operate. These are:
1. Economic performance and sustainable growth
2. Influencing behaviour and informing interventions
3. Vibrant and fair society

Whilst supporting the argument for interdisciplinarity, Paul Boyle, emphasised, several times, his argument that strong disciplines are needed to underpin such interdisciplinary work.

One predicable question was whether the ESRC would survive, or be merged. Paul Boyle responded by saying that whilst RCUUK has tried to share services there did not seem to be pressure to merge councils. And he had not heard threats to ESRC in the corridors of power. The timetable for decision making, in the wake of the spending review, require research councils to deliver their spending plans in December 2010, to be settled in February, ready for the Spending Review period to begin in April 2011.

“Overall ESRC funding has been protected in cash terms; there will be a cut in real terms but not such a big cut as had been feared.”
REF and Impact

As most of you will know, the HEFCE has been running five ‘impact’ pilots (two in the social sciences) designed to investigate whether a methodology could be developed that would enable impact to be rank ordered in the REF. The approach was to invite sample case studies and institutional statements of support. Paul Wiles, the Chair of the Impact Pilot Panel on Social Work and Social Policy, feels that the pilots demonstrate that a methodology is possible but that REF sub-panels will need freedom to make it work in their disciplines.

In the social science pilot, the case studies were helpful but the pilot panel was less convinced by institutional statements, because they needed some better indication of how representative, of the whole institution, the case studies might be. It was judged that this generic statement might be better in the ‘environment’ section of the REF.

Some specific issues emerged – many definitional – that need more attention:

- On the definition of ‘reach’. There are problems if this is considered purely in terms of geography e.g. distance and size. For example, impact in a relatively small, local region e.g. Northern Ireland, can be more significant than thin impact internationally.
- On the definition of ‘impact’. Powerful impact is not always in economic (monetary) terms. Broader definitions, including conceptual impact e.g. on public discourse, can be significant and should be recognised. So ‘benefit’ and ‘value’ are other terms with relevance although the ‘measurement’ of these will need to be convincing. (Richard Bartholomew, now at HM Treasury, raised the issue of expert advice offered to government – he quoted Kathy Silva – and made the point that impact is not necessarily traceable to a single piece of research but a body of work over a lifetime. Another contributor asked, ‘What if Government funds research but doesn’t like it?’ The consensus was that, if it produces public debate, that is impact.)
- ‘Dissemination’ is not impact, if it is only to other researchers. The strong message is that there must be evidence of impact beyond the Academy. (Within Education, though it may seem unfair, it is likely to be hard to argue that impact on other teacher educators is sufficient.)
- Methodological research can be considered but the impact needs to be demonstrably outside of the Academy.
- Recall of impact over a period of up to 15 years is likely to be accepted. The important point is that impact has to be judged retrospectively, not prospectively.
- Impact will not be valued if the underlying research is not of evidenced high quality. RAE 2* research is likely to be the minimum threshold and evidence of this standard needs to be provided. The implication is that different time frames will be needed for different parts of the REF.
- Given mobility amongst researchers, this will raise other issues of attribution, and especially whether more than one university can claim the impact. Generally the university in which the research was conducted has prior claim although this becomes problematic if an award transferred with a researcher and in instances where a team of researchers was involved, especially a team from different universities.
- The current idea is that one case study should be written for every ten researchers, but small departments may need to be allowed to submit more case studies so that judgement is not based on a single case. Likewise, there is likely to be limited benefit in having large departments submit large numbers of case studies. Therefore some sliding scale may need to be produced. A related issue is the problem of generalisation and how to prevent departments playing games to inflate their grades.
- Peer judgement remains the principal mode of assessment but peers are the hardest to convince. So one needs to ask, ‘How will my peers judge this?’

The overarching message to be drawn from the pilots, was that a convincing, coherent and concrete (with names and dates) narrative needs to be constructed. The implication is that researchers need to start early in their collection of data to evidence their stories. (Some colleagues will be pleased to learn that David Sweeney confirmed that metrics e.g. web hits, are of limited value.)

What is clear is that HEFCE will need to provide submitting institutions with very clear guidance on all these matters in order that the risks are balanced against the benefits. However, there is no suggestion that either the REF itself or the Impact element will be dropped. As Sharon Witherspoon, from the Nuffield Foundation, pointed out, ‘Engagement needs to be rewarded. Currently incentives are against this’.

So, in response to the legitimate public question, ‘What are we getting for our money?’ we need to get started on our preparations to tell our concrete and convincing stories. The political risk of not responding to such a demand is just too great.

“The overarching message to be drawn from the pilots, was that a convincing, coherent and concrete (with names and dates) narrative needs to be constructed.”
Disciplines of Writing in Educational Research

Alis Oancea, University of Oxford

It’s all change at BERA... and changes are also afoot at Research Intelligence, starting with the editorial team. Thanks are due to Ralf StClair, the lead editor over the past few years, for his excellent work – he really is a hard act to follow.

We are moving to three issues a year, each aiming to capture a range of perspectives on a current issue of relevance to the diverse sites for the generation and mobilisation of education research. RI will continue to serve as an interface between the organisational structures of BERA and its membership and we hope that a sharper focus for each issue may support that goal.

Disciplines of writing
Writing, in its many forms and with its many functions, was a major theme at the BERA 2010 conference – from the two masterclasses, to a number of papers and symposia, and to the exhibition stands in the main hall of Warwick University’s Arts Centre. Writing is disciplinary in content and conventions, cross-disciplinary as a field of research, and disciplined as a practice. The established and growing community of academic writing and development scholars and practitioners in educational institutions, in the UK and internationally, is becoming increasingly visible within BERA, too.

The last time BERA focused on writing in research was nearly ten years ago, when its guidelines for “Good Practice in Educational Research Writing” were produced (available from BERA’s website). In the current context of technological transformation and of increased expectations of researcher engagement with a wide range of audiences, the time may be right to revisit these discussions.

This issue of RI aims to prompt further dialogue around writing practice and research in education.

Call for contributions to RI 114
The next issue of RI (winter/spring 2011) will focus on the funding and assessment of education research after April 2011. If you would like to contribute please contact alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk with the subject line “RI 114”. We are keen to hear from different education sectors and interest groups, and from different sites for the generation and use of education research. The deadline for papers will be December 20, 2010.
This article offers a brief overview of the field of Academic Writing practice and theory in the UK context, and discusses key areas on which the movement to teach and research Academic Writing in UK universities has focused.

Academic Writing emerged as a field for teaching and research in the UK higher education sector in the early 1990s (Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006: xxi-xxvi). Factors that characterised higher education’s move toward becoming a mass system, such as an unprecedented growth in student numbers and a diversity of students’ cultural and educational backgrounds, began to lead scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines, including Education, Linguistics, English and Anthropology, as well as staff developers and student support staff, to focus on student writing at university level. This work on mainstream student writing was informed by, but distinct from, the study of writing of non-native speakers of English.

Supporting students’ writing
In 1998, Mary Lea and Brian Street articulated a critical framework that pushed forward scholarly debate on approaches to working with HE student writing and student writers. They described two dominant approaches to improving student writing: skills teaching and academic socialisation. Lea and Street argued for the inadequacy of both, saying that the skills approach is too reductive and that relying on academic socialisation or acculturation, which sees writing proficiency as something students absorb through exposure to disciplinary modes of knowledge, is unrealistic in a modularised higher education system. Lea and Street posited an ‘Academic Literacies’ approach that moves beyond other models by challenging the assumption that students must simply learn the conventions of writing at university, and suggests that institutional practices of writing also must change in a new mass higher education context of inclusion and diversity. Lea and Street’s Academic Literacies framework laid a basis for theorising student writing development that many writing teachers and scholars in the UK and elsewhere continue to explore.

Other influential researchers on student writing from this period and more recently include: Theresa Lillis, whose book *Student Writing: Access, Regulation, Desire* (2001) argues for the importance of student-teacher dialogue about students’ writing and ‘meaning making’ through writing, and Roz Ivani, whose book *Writing and Identity: The Discursive Construction of Identity in Academic Writing* (1998) ‘gave a new political urgency and intellectual stringency to the theoretical underpinning of work on Academic Writing’ (Tomic, in Ganobcsik-Williams, 2006: 63). Sally Mitchell’s work on teaching argument (e.g. Mitchell and Andrews 2000); Mary Lea and Barry Stierer’s *Student Writing in Higher Education: New Contexts* (2000); and Carys Jones, Joan Turner and Brian Street’s *Students Writing in the University: Cultural and Epistemological Issues* (1999) are also important contributions. One of many textbooks for student writers, now in its third edition, is Phyllis Crème and Mary Lea’s *Writing at University: A Guide for Students* (2008). An example of scholarship addressing the issue of writing standards is Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams’ *A Report on the Teaching of Writing in UK Higher Education* (2004), which argues for a developmental approach to teaching writing to all students rather than a focus on a crisis in writing standards.

The founding of Academic Writing discussion and research networks has both accompanied and enabled scholarship and practice. In the UK, two active groups are the Inter-university Academic Literacies Research Group (Aclits) and the Writing Development in Higher Education (WDHE) network. There are also three main European professional organisations that focus on Academic Writing at the tertiary level: the European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW); the European Writing Centers Association (EWCA), which is a regional affiliate of the International Writing Centers Association (IWCA); and SIG Writing, a Special Interest Group of the European Association for Research in Learning and Instruction (EARLI), which publishes ‘Studies in Writing’ book series as well as the *Journal of Writing Research*, and whose focus includes, but is not limited to, research on university student writing.

The growth of writing initiatives and writing centres in UK universities has also been a major, underpinning development for...
Academic Writing theory and practice. There are a variety of schemes, initiatives and approaches that have been established, ranging from dedicated writing centres at Coventry University, London Metropolitan University, St. Mary’s University College Belfast, the University of Limerick and the University of Gloucestershire; to a well-embedded ‘Writing in the Disciplines’ programme at Queen Mary, University of London; to a devolved model of Academic Skills Tutors at the University of Huddersfield; to ‘Writing by Appointment’ and associated student writing support programmes at the University of Dundee. In these varied and locally-contextualised ways, a sense of possibility for writing development is being realised.

Some of these models for writing development have been influenced by writing theories and pedagogies that have been imported, at least in part, from the United States, Europe, Australia and other countries. The writing centre, or ‘centre’, for example, is a model for providing individualised writing support to students that has been part of US higher education since the 1930s and established in most US universities and colleges since the 1970s. Most UK-based writing centres concentrate, as in the US, on offering students one-to-one tutorials on the writing they do for their university courses, but some (again as in the US) also engage in staff development in the teaching of writing in order to enable academics to cascade the explicit teaching of writing within their university departments. This staff development can take the form of both ‘Writing Across the Curriculum’ (WAC) and ‘Writing in the Disciplines’ (WiD). WAC theory and its ‘Writing to Learn’ (WTL) pedagogies encourage the use of writing to engage students in the processes of learning. WiD, in some ways a specialised subcomponent of WAC, ‘refers to both a research movement to understand what writing actually occurs in the different disciplinary areas and a curricular reform movement to offer disciplinary-related writing instruction’ (Bazerman et al. 2005: 9-10). The ‘Thinking Writing’ programme at Queen Mary, University of London, exemplifies a WiD approach that has developed in the UK context. Mary Deane and Peter O’Neill’s book Writing in the Disciplines (forthcoming 2010) examines further the emergence of WiD in UK universities.

Supporting staff in writing for publication

Another focus for writing developers is on supporting staff in writing for publication. Rowena Murray at the University of Strathclyde has led the field in identifying the benefits for staff in all university departments to engage in writing retreats and to learn strategies for writing and publishing. Murray’s Writing for Academic Journals (2009), now in its second edition, is a practical handbook for postgraduate students and academics who are looking to write for publication as well as for writing specialists who are seeking to provide guidance in publication writing. Since 2006, the Centre for Academic Writing at Coventry University has also been developing innovative practice in running scholarly writing retreats, ‘protected writing time’ for staff, and staff writing consultations, and demand for these types of writing provision has increased internally and externally. An equally important issue for staff development in writing for publication is the pressure on academics around the world to publish in English. Based on an eight-year text-ethnographic study of fifty scholars, Theresa Lillis and Mary Jane Curry’s Academic Writing in a Global Context: The Politics and Practices of Publishing in English (2010) examines this phenomenon in detail.

Academic writing and new technologies

In addition to stand-alone models of online writing support such as the ‘Grammar Beagle’, ‘Referencing Ferret’ and ‘Plagiarism Badger’ developed at Nottingham Trent University (http://www.ntu.ac.uk/elearning/projects/case_studies/qmp/index.html), Academic Writing teachers and scholars are exploring the potential of hypertext writing assignments (McKenna, 2004) and online writing environments. The AWESOME Dissertation Environment at the University of Leeds, for example, employs Web 2.0 technologies to support undergraduate dissertation-writing through a social network space (http://awesome.leeds.ac.uk/), while the online social software tools PBWiki and Ning are used by Writing Skills Advisors at the University of Huddersfield to support writing practice in collaborative learning communities. Online writing tutorials are now offered by the Writing Centre at London Metropolitan University (http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/depts/fls/write-now/online-tutorials.cfm) and through the Coventry Online Writing Lab (COWL) at Coventry University (http://cuba.coventry.ac.uk/cowl/), and have important implications in terms of the changing nature of writing tutorial pedagogies and for the teaching and researching of writing overall.

Academic Writing Networks

European Association for the Teaching of Academic Writing (EATAW) http://www.eataw.eu/

European Writing Centers Association (EWCA) http://ewca.sabanciuniv.edu/eng/

European Association for Research in Learning and Instruction (EARLI), SIG Writing http://www.sig-writing.org/

International Writing Centers Association (IWCA) http://writingcenters.org/

Inter-university Academic Literacies Research Group (AcLits) http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/departments/lcll/15912.html

Writing Development in Higher Education (WDHE) initiative http://www.writenow.ac.uk/news-events/wdhe-conference-2010/about-wdhe/

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The Ubiquity of Writing Skills

Dominic Wyse (pictured) and Corinne Boz, (both, University of Cambridge)

The development of language and literacy is driven by the social need to communicate. As far as writing is concerned, communication entails the production of written genres for the purpose of being read.

The recipients, or audience, may be well known or may be an anticipated but unknown readership. It is argued by many that communicative intent, whole texts, and consideration of audience should be central to the task of teaching writing. For others, the establishment of key skills and knowledge, such as formal grammar, spelling, and handwriting, are seen first and foremost as necessary precursors to effective writing. More sophisticated conceptualisations recognise that this kind of binary opposition underplays the complexities of the relationships between whole texts, their component parts, and how these should influence pedagogy. So, a key consideration in relation to the learning and teaching of writing is how linguistic features, such as grammar, spelling, referencing, and skills are most appropriately conceptualised.

Consideration of the ways that learners can best be supported to positively control the interaction between composition and transcription permeates discussions about pedagogy at different levels, from primary education to the writing of PhD students and beyond. For example in the early stages of learning to write, while the alphabetic principle, spelling, and handwriting are essential aspects of learning, during teaching they can be unhelpfully decontextualised from the processes of writing. At later stages there can be lack of understanding of the place of drafting and redrafting, and how different stages in the writing process require different compositional and transcriptional emphases.

For students in higher education there are also questions about the most appropriate ways to teach writing skills. For example, Kamler and Thomson (2006) remind us of the importance of seeing writing as social practice and draw attention to the “absurdity” of the “skills-based orientation” (p.6), that they see in some books. This critique stimulates a number of questions. For example: how should we define a skills-based orientation? To what extent do guides on writing adopt a skills-based or social practice emphasis? Is the categorisation in binary terms appropriate? The idea that language issues must be appropriately contextualised is right but the risk of denigrating skills-based texts is that this can add to a discourse which highlights the divide between ‘practices’ and ‘skills’. New analyses of texts that purport to support writers, including analysis of implicit theories (perhaps akin to what fiction writers call ‘back story’); analyses that seek to shed light on why so many students buy some skills-based texts; and the extent of the usefulness of the texts both from the perspectives of students and from an analysis of their writing outputs could be a very useful addition to the field. Our view is that the transcription elements of writing are not fundamentally separate entities but component parts that are intimately connected, hence

Smith (1994) usefully categorised the two main aspects of writing as authorial and secretarial, categories he called composition and transcription. The composition aspects include the generation of ideas, whereas transcription includes aspects such as spelling and skills. These two aspects have different prominence at different times during the writing process. Writers must control both aspects and be mindful that during the process of writing an undue focus on either can result in a negative interaction between the two.

“Knowing how to contextualise the teaching of writing in the best interests of learners takes considerable knowledge, skill and experience at any level of education.”

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transcription teaching should be contextualised. Knowing how to contextualise the teaching of writing in the best interests of learners takes considerable knowledge, skill and experience at any level of education.

**Grammar and composition**

In order to illustrate the concept of contextualisation we have chosen an early draft of a PhD registration proposal document that is normally completed towards the end of the first year of the PhD. The focus of the proposed research was creativity in primary education. The first sentence of the introduction to the document was as follows:

*In the age of knowledge economy, economic growth, a feature of scientific and technological revolutions, correlates with innovation potential.*

A narrow evaluation of this sentence might simply be to say that the grammar of the first phrase is non-standard and should be: ‘In the age of the knowledge economy...’ Although this is a necessary correction, on its own it would be a narrow evaluation because of the neglect of a myriad of arguably more important considerations.

For example, there is the question of whether the knowledge economy can legitimately be described as “an age”. Evaluation of the phrase also means appreciating its role as part of the meaning of the sentence as a whole. The sentence had a particular importance because of its location as the first sentence of the first paragraph of the text. The first word, sentence, paragraph, page, chapter, determine the overall character of the text, and are the things that readers are particularly sensitive to. In addition, the student's sentence served as a topic sentence for the paragraph. The paragraph went on to make the case that creativity is a major component of innovation potential and that there is a relationship between creativity and national competitiveness. So the topic sentence was not a sufficiently coherent marker for what was to follow. Finally, there was the bigger question of whether the topic of the knowledge economy was the most appropriate for the start of the document. The answer to this included consideration of genre, audience and the academic discipline of education where the student's work was located.

It was argued by the supervisors that the second paragraph that summarised the importance of creativity for human civilisation was a more appropriate beginning to the piece because of the ‘bigger picture’ that the topic of human civilisation portrayed. They also had the view that a sequence of ideas that progressed from the overarching idea about human civilisation to the important but more narrowly focused idea of creativity and innovation might be a more appropriate sequence. As we have illustrated, what could have been seen as a minor misuse of grammar was linked to a number of important compositional aspects. In order to help the student’s writing in the most effective way it was necessary to discuss the grammar in the context of the compositional issues.

**Referencing conventions**

Let us now take an example of transcription that affects students doing GCSE courses and professional writers alike – referencing (a convention that unfortunately even the august body the International Baccalaureate Organisation fell foul of in 2010). Referencing is probably regarded by many as simply a somewhat tiresome convention that is required to be accurately completed prior to submission of a text, but is perhaps better understood as a feature that is a part of academic argument and knowledge (Wyse, 2007). Referencing is a convention, or more accurately a set of conventions, that can generate considerable debate between professional academic writers. However, there are some key understandings that if shared can ensure that time for writing is not wasted through needless disagreement. These understandings are in part related to the wider features of writing as social practice. Most important of all is the idea that institutional agreements about conventions such as referencing are an essential feature that enable the efficient production of most formal texts, student writing included.

How then should an institution decide on the most appropriate conventions to adopt? The first consideration is that there are well established, well adopted, professionally published guides that robustly address the area of referencing and many other important aspects of text production. The American Psychological Association guide is a good example. However, many education writers drawing on disciplines such as history, philosophy, or narrative theory prefer the notes/bibliography system. The Chicago Manual of Style provides an alternative professionally published guide that supports the notes/bibliography system. In view of the repeated revisions of these guides (APA is now in its sixth edition; CMS is in its 14th edition), undertaken by editors devoted specially to the task, there are very good reasons for using them as the stimulus for institutional guides. The alternative can be different departments (or even different teaching teams) expending time and resource to produce guides that differ (admittedly often in minor ways), to the detriment of efficient writing for all concerned. Another reason for adopting widely recognised styles is that computer software that aids citing and referencing is increasingly used by academic writers. These software packages save considerable amounts of time because they are pre-loaded with well known styles. If institutions don’t take account of these packages then writers who use the software face more time having to adjust settings to a less conventional system. Hence the development of appropriate referencing is an area of academic understanding, but also a skill, and a social practice that is part of the context of local and international institutional practices.

The need for educators to balance the compositional and transcriptional aspects of writing, and to carefully locate skills development by taking account of socio-cultural factors is well understood by many; However, little is known about the extent to which such balance is realised by the majority of educators. Continued study of writing teaching across transitions is a fruitful line for further thinking.

**References**


In recent years there has been a steady growth in the number of international students coming to the UK for graduate studies. Many are non-native speakers of English (NNSE) and although they may have gained the necessary grades in a language test such as IELTS, most still struggle with the extremely exacting requirements of writing a thesis, dissertation or other lengthy academic text.

Courses on academic writing can help bridge this gap, but most of the responsibility for improving written language skills inevitably falls upon individual students and their supervisors or tutors. There is a need, then, to find ways in which such novice writers can improve their writing themselves and thus develop as independent and autonomous learners. Recent research suggests that one such possibility is offered by corpus consultation.

A corpus is a collection of electronic texts that is accessible through software which allows the user to search for specific words or phrases. Every occurrence of the search word is presented in the centre of a line on screen, with about 5 words on either side. This presentation, called a concordance, allows the user to discover the patterns associated with the way in which the search word is used in context and thus provides a rich resource for the learner writer.

For example, the short concordance in Figure 1 was taken from a small corpus of theses written by native-speakers in a social science: politics. It shows the semi-fixed phrase ‘play a role...’ and highlights two aspects of importance for NNSE writers. First, it enables them to check the use of the preposition, (‘in’) and the following structure, either a noun phrase (e.g. ‘his account’) or an ‘–ing’ form (e.g. ‘maintaining’); second, it shows some of the most frequent adjectives that occur before the noun ‘role’, thus allowing them to expand their knowledge of common adjective/noun collocations.

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Native-speakers possess a vast store of such semi-fixed expressions, which they draw on in the production of texts, but for the NNSE, mastering them represents a huge challenge. Dictionaries and reference grammars provide little assistance, since such patterns are too many to list and many involve complex combinations of grammatical and lexical features. From a concordance, however, the writer can immediately see numerous instances of a given pattern and can use this data to draw conclusions regarding language use. Corpus consultation, then, provides the NNSE writer with a new resource for learning, which supplements traditional dictionaries and grammars.

Among the many freely available on-line corpora, one of the most useful for students working in Britain is the British National Corpus (BNC), which contains 100 million words of written and spoken language and includes a component consisting of academic texts (http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/). The interface to the BNC maintained by Brigham Young University is particularly appropriate for academic writers, since it allows the user to restrict their search to an individual section of the corpus (http://corpus.byu.edu/bnc/). Thus by choosing the academic component, the user can be confident that all the concordance lines containing their search term are relevant in terms of register.

One of the advantages of consulting a large general corpus like the BNC is that they are designed to be representative of a wide cross-section of language; thus the information they provide gives a reliable picture of general language use. However, in addition to general queries, many students also have linguistic problems related to specialist terms and disciplinary usages. Searching even the academic component of the BNC for such items will either not return any results, or will retrieve non-specialist uses that are not relevant to the query. There is an argument, then, for the use of smaller corpora, tailored more specifically to the needs of the individual student (Tribble, 2002).

With the wealth of material available in electronic form on the web, it is relatively straightforward to create custom-built corpora and there are a number of accounts of their use, particularly within single discipline academic writing classes. Gavioli (2005), for example, suggests that small specialised corpora are particularly useful in helping students to understand and conceptualise the world of the discipline and illustrates this approach using purpose-built corpora with economics students. Similarly, Weber (2001) describes a genre- and discipline-specific course in which students examine a corpus of legal essays in order to discover the formal and functional characteristics of this genre.

However, many graduates do not have the opportunity to attend writing courses that are specific to their discipline, let alone their research area, and for them, a resource that is both readily available and tailored to their own needs would be preferable. One possible solution is suggested by Lee and Swales (2006), who describe a writing course in which a mixed-discipline group of graduates built their own corpora from research articles in their individual fields. During the 13-week programme, these students became competent and enthusiastic corpus users, able to interrogate their corpora successfully and make use of the findings in their own writing. However, this study concerned only a small number of participants (6) and did not provide sufficient quantitative data to enable a satisfactory assessment of the feasibility and value of the procedure.

More recently, an attempt has been made to introduce do-it-yourself corpus-building with larger groups of graduates (Charles, 2010). Initial findings show that the 50 participants in this study were highly positive in their attitudes to and evaluation of the approach. Thus, 90% or over agreed that it was easy to build their own corpus and that its use helped them improve their writing, while an even higher percentage (94%) indicated their intention of using their corpus for help with their English in the future. It would seem, then, that the creation of their own corpus offers a promising new tool for graduates keen to develop their proficiency in discipline-specific writing.

There are several advantages to this approach: first, the corpus supplies subject-specific examples of language, enabling the student to find out how expert writers express ideas and structure texts within a shared and quite narrowly defined area. Second, because students are familiar with the contents of the corpus, it is easier for them to understand and interpret the concordance lines. However, the most important advantage of the do-it-yourself corpus is that the student is in control of the content. It is the student who chooses what to put into the corpus and can adjust it according to their own needs.

With some knowledge of corpus consultation and access to their custom-built resource, the novice writer can take a more active and independent part in their own learning. They no longer have to rely solely on dictionaries, grammars or other native-speakers, but can solve their own problems by analysing the relevant language data themselves, thus engaging more actively in the process of knowledge construction. Direct contact with the data encourages learners to formulate their own hypotheses and verify their generalisations about language. To quote the motto of an early pioneer of corpus consultation by students (Johns, 2002:108): ‘Every student a Sherlock Holmes!’.

References


Deleuze and Collaborative Writing: Reflections upon a Masterclass

The purpose of the half-day master class “Deleuze and Collaborative Writing as Method of Inquiry”, which Ken and Jonathan facilitated at BERA Conference 2010 and which Gunnhildur and Liz attended, was to enable participants to engage in and reflect upon the use of collaborative writing as method of inquiry, drawing from some of the principles and ideas of the late 20th century French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze.

Participants in the workshop – there were six in all – came from a variety of settings, each expressing an interest in using narrative and collaborative approaches to inquiry and in applying innovative and creative aspects of Deleuzian thought to their own professional practice.

The master class process
The introductory exercise – the zigzag – offered an immediate opportunity to immerse ourselves in Deleuze and collaborative writing. The exercise runs as follows: Each person introduces themselves to one other member of the group, with the rest as witnesses; ‘respondents’ listen, allowing thoughts, feelings and connections to emerge before, in turn, introducing themselves to another member of the group. When the spoken introductory ‘zigzag’ is complete, each writes a response to the other’s introduction. Writings are passed to the respective ‘introducer’ (a second zigzag moment, as people stand to give in one direction and receive from another), and these writings responded to with further writing which, once complete, is passed back in further zigzag-ing.

The exercise draws on Deleuze’s own use of the zigzag metaphor, which, he says, illustrates bringing “singularities into relationship” (Boutang, 1996). The process, with each member of the group connecting with others, also illuminates the Deleuzian notion of assemblage, which Deleuze used to challenge the scientific reductionism emerging from the Enlightenment thought that perpetuates the ascendancy of neo-liberal individualism. Deleuze argued that whilst we can talk of singularities of self we need to do so in relation to multiplicities.

Following time spent considering key Deleuzian figures, such as nomad thought, smooth and striated space, the rhizome, and territorialisation, Ken and Jonathan offered a short reading of their collaborative writing to which they invited the group (including themselves), with those figures in mind, to write in response. We finished the master class with reading aloud our writing.

Reflections
We offer the following comments, written by the four of us as part of a collaborative exchange of writing subsequent to the workshop, to give a sense of the experience of the master class.

I remember that Jonathan was barefoot. It took me a while to get my mind focused. I came late, since the cathedral wine had gotten to me the evening before (the BERA 2010 conference dinner was in Coventry cathedral). It is not often that you see the bare feet of an advisor… professor, tutor, teacher… but it was curious and opened up for a different kind of listening… perhaps like a yoga instructor, who speaks, but the words are more to lead you somewhere, in your mind, in your body, than to pass on particular information… When I think of it I had also noticed Ken’s feet, the evening before… at the cathedral… it has to have been him, wearing the red shoes… I can’t be sure, of course, but in my memory the person wearing the red shoes has a strong resemblance with Ken… But this is all very appropriate, isn’t it? We spoke of the smooth and the striated and how the nomad leaves a trail in the desert, even without it being visible… and it is with her feet that the nomad leaves the trail… the path, the… I’m not finding the right word in English… râkina, râhî, râhdîna. Even though we were not travelling over the desert, nor being particularly nomadic in that physical sense, we did indeed make a journey of a sort, this morning.

My journey was inwards. I was pleasantly surprised of how much of the Deleuzian words were familiar. I thought I had forgotten it all, Thousand Plateaus… we read it… me and my fellow first year students. The act of writing together at the master class in Warwick moved my journey back to that time and place. It created the space to dwell in, this shared experience created with words, which I so often seek in my writing, telling, drawing, recording and playing. I am amazed at the strength of this space; it was almost visible… touchable? I was aware that it was created with everyone’s mutual effort, words from each of us… yet I was not so much aware of the being of the others… just that we were there together… the togetherness of it… yes, I think that is the feeling that remains with me.
Final thoughts

The potential for innovation and transgression suggested by the approaches described and the reflections offered encourages us as researchers in education to focus upon the differentiation that is ever-present as we engage in the kinds of Deleuzian becoming that we refer to here. We suggest that the ability of collaborative writing as a method of inquiry to explore, question and encourage experimentation with hitherto established practices and fixed notions of individualised identity opens upon a challenging field of inquiry (see Gale and Wyatt, 2009).

The active differentiation that can occur when engaging in this kind of work focuses in upon what Deleuze would term the molecular and the intensive; it draws upon the intuitive, the sensitive and the affective and works to energise and mobilise the potential for examining notions of self and practice.

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The half-day masterclass ‘Writing a Book Proposal’ at the BERA 2010 Conference was facilitated by Philip Mudd (publisher at Routledge) and Pat Thomson (professor of education at the University of Nottingham). The facilitators used a framework drawing on Norman Fairclough’s analyses of discourse to describe the processes of authoring, editing and publishing a book as multi-layered sets of practices (sociocultural, discursive, and textual). They made explicit the different conventions, requirements, and expectations shaping these practices and provided concrete advice and guiding questions to help aspiring authors navigate each of these layers. Attendees at the masterclass were invited to reflect on the experience and share useful insights from the session. We have selected a sample of these reviews aimed at reflecting the varied perspectives of participants at different stages of their research careers - doctoral students, post doctoral researchers, early career academics.

Patricia Davies,
University of Manchester
As a mathematics and computer science under-graduate student I did very little writing apart for solving mathematical equations, or proving one did not exist, and writing segments of programming code. Even as a master’s student, much of the writing I did involved reporting or describing, which is one kind of academic writing, but quite different from the kind of writing I do now.

I am currently studying for a doctorate in education (EdD) at the University of Manchester, where I have learned to read more critically and now view the academic writing I do as my contribution to a wider debate. This means I no longer wish to distance myself from the claims I make. I am quite surprised at how quickly I switched from the linear and logical style of scientific writing to a more interpretative one, which forces me to take a stance - often a socially critical position. I probably ceased using the third person the day after my first meeting with my supervisor, who talked about how writing tends to make the researcher voice and position more transparent. Indeed, everything I held sacred about scientific research writing soon came crashing down.

When I write these days, a lot of time is spent thinking about my position: what I am trying to say, and how to convey these messages.

Boakye Agyemang,
University of Birmingham
The masterclass was very timely for me as an early career researcher, and also provided a useful professional development opportunity. Mudd and Thomson presented a conceptual framework - Fairclough’s three dimensional model of discourse - of work involved in developing a book proposal, setting out the main differences between three common media for academic communication: the thesis, journal articles and books.

Participants were involved in the hands on activity of writing a book proposal. For me, the big question was how to engage an international readership for my book which focuses on education in Ghana. Receiving feedback – in a friendly and supportive learning environment – on what kind of writing might attract international attention will go a long way to help me plan for life after my PhD. Alternatives to an international monograph may include seeking a local publisher, contributing a chapter to an edited book in a related area or publishing as many journal articles as possible. I realised that not all theses can be turned into books.

Running the masterclasses in conjunction with the BERA annual conference was a good idea and I urge BERA to continue doing so.
were provided to help structure responses, after which volunteers in preparing and presenting a ‘pitch’ for a book. Guide questions

A very useful, ‘hands-on’ part of the workshop involved participants from the publisher’s perspective, as a potential ‘product’. There were key learning points for me.

Philip Mudd gave a list of ten useful, down to earth pointers for getting a book proposal accepted by a publisher, such as finding out the right editor to send it to and explaining why it is timely and pertinent. As a novice, I found all of this extremely helpful. It helped me to adjust my thinking, away from the perspective of a thesis writer.

Pat and Philip asked us to produce a pitch of around 200 words to present our proposed book or paper, in a ‘Dragons Den’- like exercise. I found the workshop very useful and I would recommend it to colleagues. It has saved me from wasting time in finding out the hard way what is not required, although of course there is never any guarantee of, or formula for, success.

Joan Smith,
University of Leicester

As a relative newcomer to academia, I found the class provided helpful insights into the process of publishing a first book, as well as opportunities to reflect on what the topic of that book might be. The importance of publishing and communicating research as a member of the scholarly community was emphasised. Importantly this was interwoven with detailed discussion about the practical and commercial considerations of which publishers need to take account in making decisions about manuscripts. Listening to the combined perspectives of a publisher and a widely-published academic nudged me into stepping outside the work in which I was immersed, to consider my ideas from a publisher’s perspective, as a potential ‘product’.

A very useful, ‘hands-on’ part of the workshop involved participants in preparing and presenting a ‘pitch’ for a book. Guide questions were provided to help structure responses, after which volunteers were invited to present their pitch and receive feedback. Having arrived with a vague idea for a book, the process of preparing and presenting the pitch enabled me to gain greater clarity about what I was proposing to write and for whom. This was further refined as I was later able to reflect on the feedback I received, realising that I had probably over-estimated what could be covered by one book, and that I had, potentially, the material and focus for three different texts, each targeting a different audience. The need to ensure crystal clarity with regard to the prime subject area on which each book is focused, the intended readership and the originality of the work were key learning points for me.

Opportunities to work with academics and publishers are invaluable. More (possibly informal) opportunities to meet publishers as a part of writing workshops, and/or some form of follow-up contact for participants to encourage and support them in taking the first step to publishing would also be welcomed. And now, I really should make a start on that book proposal…

Jenny Hawkins,
Edge Hill University

Having completed my PhD this year I decided to go along to this workshop to find out suitable ways to disseminate my findings and share my experiences. The workshop was timely and useful in orienting me towards redrafting and using ideas from my work as a basis for future publications.

Pat Thomson started with publishing papers in suitable journals and discussed tailoring one’s writing to journal styles and text formats, undergoing the sometimes lengthy refereeing and editing process. She then turned her attention to book publishing. She listed and explained requirements for textbooks, monographs, books to supplement educational courses and interests, handbooks for practitioner use, and specialist professional books. She gave an idea of possible commissioning editor perspectives in looking for originality, structure, coherence, a likely readership, author’s academic credibility, communication skills in the light of the target readership and practical issues such as costs of review, images, permissions and possible improvements to presentation and format.

Philip Mudd gave a list of ten useful, down to earth pointers for getting a book proposal accepted by a publisher, such as finding out the right editor to send it to and explaining why it is timely and pertinent. As a novice, I found all of this extremely helpful. It helped me to adjust my thinking, away from the perspective of a thesis writer.

Pat and Philip asked us to produce a pitch of around 200 words to present our proposed book or paper, in a ‘Dragons Den’- like exercise. I found the workshop very useful and I would recommend similar experiences to others. I am now working on a much more viable interesting and potentially more successful book proposal as a result. It has saved me from wasting time in finding out the hard way what is not required, although of course there is never any guarantee of, or formula for, success.

Alison Hales,
University of Greenwich

Having recently found myself in a new career in higher education and consequently submerged in the muddy waters of writing and research, I was fortunate to attend and present at the BERA Early Career Researcher Conference. Initial ideas for a book had already been considered with a colleague, but these were rudimentary, as neither of us had knowledge about the process of writing proposals, publishing or even how we might access the required information.

I attended the masterclass with the hope of acquiring new understanding that could be taken back and shared. Philip Mud gave a clear and constructive framework outlining the fundamental components of writing a book proposal. Pat Thomson offered a useful conceptualisation of the process. The parallel presentation from two experts in their field, sharing their knowledge from different but intrinsically linked perspectives, was invaluable.

From a personal viewpoint I applaud the masterclass! The quality of content, organisation and academic rigour applied can only be described as first class. It has enabled me to gain an informed insight into the process of proposal writing, a vital element for any emerging academic or early career researcher. It has supported me in my role of ‘research champion’ and I have been able to disseminate knowledge and understanding to colleagues and encourage greater participation in these areas. The outcomes have been positive and instrumental in the pursuit of raising the research profile of our primary education department.
This an interesting question to ask, not least because higher education is a discourse saturated in writing. Written texts constitute the primary means by which students, across disciplines, access information in higher education; writing is how students and lecturers articulate their ideas and learning across the disciplines. Most lecturers assess students’ learning through writing assignments and submit their own writing to the judgement of editors and reviewers in journals and other publications. Academic writing practices and conventions can, therefore, be regarded as one of the means by which the Academy produces, defines and polices itself as a distinct and privileged social institution. Perhaps, however, what appears obvious and uncontestable about ‘good writing’, may actually disguise complicated and unequal manifestations of cultural power operating within and through higher education. For this reason any exploration of lecturers’ individual views on and experiences of writing in HE, cannot not be divorced from the influence of dominant institutional discoursal conventions.

Interestingly, despite the high stakes, writing in HE appears to exist within what Lillis and Turner (2001) have coined a ‘discourse of transparency’. I would argue that this ‘transparency’ results in a situation where support and development around writing in HE are often conducted using a terminology that presents itself as clear and self-evident, but which in practice is often vague and highly contested, not least between different modules and lecturers.

This situation occurs because a powerful, if conflicted, model of ‘good writing’ predominates in HE. It is a utilitarian, skills-based, autonomous model which presupposes that writing, once grasped, has universal applications which are devoid of any ideological or cultural values (Street, 1996). It assumes, often simplistically and inaccurately, that lecturers can clearly identify and articulate what ‘good writing’ is. In this context what actually constitutes ‘good writing’ only becomes visible or a pedagogic issue when students are deemed to not be able to produce it.

My research draws on social theories of language. As such I am interested in looking at the ways in which writing, and importantly writing development in HE, can be viewed more productively as a social and communal practice rather than the acquisition of a set of individual attributes or skills. Gee (1996) describes how literacy practices, objects and events operate within specific discourses, such as higher education, in different and often conflicting ways. Viewed through this kind of theoretical lens the ‘grand narratives’ that inform, and one might say, regulate, institutional discoursal conventions informing ‘good writing’ in HE, actually dissolve into a plethora of competing or complementary practices, values and expectations which inevitably contextualise and complicate individual lecturers’ perceptions of students’ writing and writing development.

For this reason I would like to suggest that it may be more productive to view lecturers’ perceptions of students’ writing and writing development as emerging out of a ‘writing in higher education habitus’. This takes into account an individual lecturer’s past and present experiences of writing and writing development, but simultaneously situates them within a diverse and often contradictory ‘field’ of higher education writing practices. Reay (2004) discusses how habitus operates at an unconscious level ‘unless disturbed by events that cause self-questioning’ (my emphasis). Research that asks lecturers to record and reflect upon their experiences, perceptions and expectations around students’ writing and writing development can initiate a more critical stance toward the ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the dominant discourses on writing in HE. The concept of habitus can in this way encourage educators and educational researchers to rethink and deepen their understanding of the role that writing and writing development can play in their work by radicalising their understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge within HE.

To begin to challenge these entrenched positions we may need educators and researchers to shift the emphasis in HE away from a rhetoric of writing that focuses on falling standards and students who can’t write, and begin instead to critique dominant assumptions about academic writing as integral to the learning process, not simply as an end product.

The Answer is ‘Good Writing’
What is the Question?

Amanda French, Wolverhampton University

My recent BERA conference paper, ‘Do lecturers really know what they want from their students’ writing in higher education?’ began to explore the central philosophical question of how power, personal and social, is exercised through writing practices in higher education.

References


Work-based learning is the predominant route to gain qualifications by staff already working in the independent and voluntary sectors of the health and social care and childcare workforce.

Why work-based learning?
The advantages of work-based learning are twofold. Firstly, it offers an opportunity to qualify whilst working and in so doing, helps employers to maintain the required volume of staff in the sector to meet regulatory and workforce demands. Secondly, it demands that staff reach required levels of knowledge and key competencies that underpin their workforce activity.

In theory, these advantages should bring together the needs of the employer and learner in a symbiotic relationship in which supply and demand combine to produce a better quality of employee and service. However, the practical reality is that stakeholder investment in work-based learning is frequently affected by a number of factors that introduce a potential for conflict. These factors include the reluctance of employers to ‘invest in staff who move on’, and the sometimes reluctant employee who, having secured a post, does not always recognise the benefit of engaging in further learning. Given this potential for conflict, work-based learning can mean reducing learning opportunities to box-ticking exercises and evidence collection.

Research Design
The two-year study, 2007 to 2009, began as a desire to triangulate and integrate regulatory standards of health and social care, national occupational standards of qualifications and employer policies and procedures. It evolved to become a comprehensive action research project that sought to bring together the needs of individual learners, workplace and employer, with the intention of strengthening the relationship between them. The project consisted of a four-stage Action Research cycle that drew upon the disciplines of management, education, health and social care and early education and care. It included seven organisations, one hundred learners, four hundred and sixty five vocationally related qualifications and one thousand eight hundred learning reviews in a process that, during the life of the project, was subject to eighteen external quality assurance audits.

Implementation of the project required an amalgamation of competencies of work-based learning providers, including the skills to professionally and sensitively promote the knowledge and skills of learners until they reach the desired levels of unconscious competence that are recognised attributes of the strong, intuitive practitioner. In addition, it required of them an ability to differentiate the core business goals and the place of each individual within it, to respond to the culture of each workplace, to build individual and team relationships, to manage a training plan within the business model and to continually respond to current needs while proactively addressing future need.

Building Foundations
Sharing perspectives about investment was critical to engagement in the process: developing a shared understanding of the different but equal investment being made by employers and employee/learner. The predominant investment of employers was employee time for engagement in the learning process, an often unrecognised investment in a context in which no direct cost is evident. For the employee/learner the investment was engagement in the lived experiences of learning, a personal effort that frequently required investment outside of working hours. By engaging both stakeholders in a cost/benefit analysis, the mutual benefits of work-based learning could be established: employers were likely to secure a qualified workforce in a shortage sector while learners gained qualifications that were owned by them and that were transferable should they leave. So began the process of drawing together the aspirations of employer and learner, the interdependence of them and the relationship between them. A key component of this was the role of mentor. Chosen for their ability to motivate and nurture those often disaffected by previous learning experiences, the mentors were instrumental in championing learning and promoting attitudes and aptitudes that supported qualification success and engagement in further learning. The mentoring process began as structured, formal mentoring, supporting initial learning experiences, and evolved to become a constantly shifting, complex web of activity that continually adapted to learner need and included formal and informal, negotiated, experimental, team and peer mentoring systems.

Outcome /Benefits
Continuing assessment confirmed increasing competencies of learners and qualification success. With an overall progression in learning of 39 percent the desire to learn beyond initial qualifications clearly indicated that workplace learning had become the often-predicted internal driver for ongoing success. The mentors played a key role in this process.

The immediate benefit to stakeholders was a perceived reduction in workplace demand for time off for study. The longer-term impact in six out of the seven workplaces was a cultural shift that resulted in an increased sense of purpose in the workplace; greater understanding of the overarching workplace needs and roles and responsibilities in it, improved external quality audit reports, reduced staff turnover and increased employee engagement with job roles and responsibilities.
It is, perhaps, more interesting to ask why some resilient learners – those learners who face considerably more challenges than the average student – persist. Why is it that some adult learners are so resilient and successful against the odds? That was where I began my doctoral investigation.

In order to engage in the question fully I developed an original methodology which drew on two very different academic disciplines: Education and English. As a result, the thesis had to develop its own resilience in order to resist the temptation to run to the safety of one or other of those disciplines. Here are some reflections on how that happened.

The investigation began in a very conventional way. I interviewed a range of resilient learners from UK higher education institutions, all of whom had faced considerable challenges in the course of their studies. For some this meant the death of loved ones and sudden, serious illnesses. Others were remarkable because they were successful despite lacking capital in every sense or because they had refused to comply with the rules of the academic game and still they succeeded. When I started to categorise the data, though, I found that the interviewees’ language would not comply with the neatly themed lines that my dutifully purchased highlighter pens wanted to draw.

Instead, these learners talked about love, death, hope and anger in ways that my broadly Bourdieusian framework failed to let breathe. It felt appallingly simplistic to categorise some of the passionate accounts of how the love of a partner had given someone the courage to continue studying, despite suffering from a life-threatening illness, as ‘social capital’. Learning as a literal and metaphorical antidote to death was emerging as a key theme in the study. People talked vividly about learning opening them up but my academic tools had the effect of closing their responses down. One woman, who had returned to learning in her 60s, told me that her world had expanded as a result – “It just amazes. It’s almost like a Disney: star gazing.” What do you do with a quotation like that? The attempt to categorise it left the speaker diminished and monochrome on the page.

As well as feeling increasingly frustrated with the restricted language of social science, I also knew that there was another area of data that included rich and deep understandings of resilient adult learning that was not represented anywhere in the work. Somewhere in the background I could hear that archetypal resilient adult learner, Rita, laughing at the naiveté of her teacher Frank when she returns from her Open University Summer School, ‘You don’t do Blake without doing Innocence and Experience, do y’!’ And it dawned on me, you don’t do resilient adult learners without doing Educating Rita, do you?

So I returned to my first academic discipline of English Literature to see if there were other texts which could help me to understand this mutable and elusive thing - resilient learning. I started to read literary – mainly drama - texts closely and critically again for the first time in years and I let Rita lead me to her fictional half-sisters and ancestors.
Of course ‘Educating Rita’ echoes George Bernard Shaw’s 1916 play, *Pygmalion*. Shaw cleverly made the crucial allegorical link between teaching and learning and Ovid’s first century poetic rendition of the myth of Pygmalion in *Metamorphoses*. In that story the eponymous sculptor creates a statue of a perfect woman in order to compensate himself for the numerous faults that he sees in the women around him. He falls in love with his own creation to such an extent that his adoration brings the statue to life. Ovid’s text has been reworked many times in Western art and literature as a profound allegory for, among other things, the complex relationship between artist and art, the tension between perfection and reality and the limitations and effects of masculine desire. Shaw recognised the potential for this story to also say something powerful about adult learning. In his hands the statue became a cockney flower girl; spirited, independent and desperate for transformation. Shaw’s *Pygmalion* character is Professor Henry Higgins. The play is a depressing depiction of teaching as the practice of reproduction. Poor Eliza never has the chance to become fully resilient, as Rita does, because Higgins will not consent change in himself. Here we have metamorphosis but certainly not transformation.

Allegorical readings of other literary texts which incorporate the Pygmalion myth followed. I wanted to see what insights they offered into transformational adult learning and the nature of resilience within it. Shakespeare subverts the myth in the final scene of *The Winter’s Tale* in which he places three of his most intelligent and majestic female characters – Hermione, Perdita and Paulina – on stage at the same time. In his version of Ovid’s *Pygmalion* we are encouraged to understand resilience in terms of the ability to escape the binaries of reality/art, right/wrong and life/death. We enter a new, adult understanding of the world, which is not governed by the destructive work of opposites. In Ted Hughes’ version (1997) we have a beautiful re-telling of the myth as a story of a feminine energy and power. He has a female spirit who is ‘sick of unbeing’ invade the body of a woman-phobic sculptor in order to sculpt herself a body. She gets into his hands and provides him with the talent to create a body for her into which she can enter, take form, and start living again. In Hughes’ reading the agency comes from the statue/learner character; it is the teacher who is passive and malleable.

The literary texts helped me to think deeply about what transformational adult learning really means and about what supports or limits resilience within it. But including them presented me with a methodological dilemma. I needed a theoretical framework that would provide me with a defence of the way I was combining the literary texts, empirical data and literary theory – zig-zagging between literary texts, empirical data and literary theory – with each text enriching and enlivening my understanding of the others – and all the time deepening and multiplying my readings of resilience.

But still something was missing. For all my playful and exhilarated crossing of boundaries, the study remained an intellectual enterprise with me safely outside of the texts. The loneliness of interdisciplinary study and the fear that accompanied taking such big methodological risks felt very real to me. I wanted to write about the resilience I was developing as a result of the doctoral work. But each time I tried, somehow, the raw reality of the experience withered in my account of it. So I decided to embrace Yeats’ assertion that ‘there’s more enterprise in walking naked’ (‘A Coat’, 1916). In other words, writing without the protection of frameworks (in his case, mythological, in my case, theoretical) reaps the richest rewards. I started to write nakedly. I wrote about my own experience of adult learning in a way that was entirely stripped of academic referencing, authority moves or scholarly protocols. At that point I crossed over into a creative space which is full of terror and beauty. The result was a highly risky autobiographical section in which I inhabit a position of extreme vulnerability within the context of that most defended of mediums, a PhD.

I half seriously refer to the method I developed as la recherche féminine, after Cixous’ *l’écriture féminine* which served as the ontological and epistemological framework for the study. Femininity here has nothing to do with biological femaleness. Rather it is a commitment to challenging boundaries and the underlying assumptions about what constitutes appropriate knowledge and writing in a research text.

Cixous’ work offers the freedom of deconstruction but without the tendency towards nihilism and intellectual elitism which often accompanies the writing and teaching of her male peers. Her writing is passionate, compassionate, challenging and beautiful. I felt, at last, that the words of the learners in the study could be opened up and dignified by the enquiry. And so I crossed boundaries, zig-zagging between literary texts, empirical data and literary theory – with each text enriching and enlivening my understanding of the others – and all the time deepening and multiplying my readings of resilience.

“The loneliness of interdisciplinary study and the fear that accompanied taking such big methodological risks felt very real to me.”


References

BERA Meeting of Minds Awards 2010–11

Applications are welcome for the BERA Meeting of Minds Fellowships 2010-11.

BERA Meeting of Minds Awards are aimed at educational researchers who have already established themselves in the field by high quality publication but who have yet to become Principal Investigators (or equivalent) in their own right.

The Scheme provides modest funding for a targeted programme of mentoring with a more experienced colleague (usually beyond the applicant’s home institution) which will enhance the applicant’s ability to gain high quality research funding or equivalent, to publish and subsequently to develop the research capacities of others.

It is anticipated that each Fellowship will be relatively short in duration and have a definite outcome which should lead to the furtherance of the research career and research contribution of the applicant. There is no provision for salary costs for either applicants or mentors and it is anticipated that most costs will be incurred in travel and subsistence and will be in the range £300–£600.

Applications where the applicants and the proposed mentor are in the same institution must show how funds will be genuinely additional to those which might reasonably be expected from internal staff development budgets.

Applications should be made using the pro-forma available from the BERA website (www.bera.ac.uk) and should be accompanied by a one page Curriculum Vitae for both the applicant and the mentor.

Proposals should be submitted by email to the BERA Office (admin@bera.ac.uk) before 12.00 noon on 1st December 2010.

Guidance

Applicants should be educational researchers who are establishing themselves in the field by high quality publications but who have yet to become Principal Investigators (or equivalent) in their own right or require support in undertaking and writing up research projects.

The scheme will fund a programme of mentoring with the intention of furthering the applicant’s career and research contribution through activities such as:

- Critical appraisal of draft bids, journal articles or other potential publications;
- Support with publication and advice on where to publish;
- Discussion and debate on specific research topics;
- Advice on developing a further area or field of expertise (usually where the mentor is a recognised expert, has a strong reputation and is well published);
- Building skills in methodologies and project management.

Mentors should normally:

- Be published experts in the field or the particular skill set identified in the needs analysis;
- Be at a different institution and not part of a current or recent formal relationship with the applicant, such as doctoral supervision or a collaborative research project.

BERA Dissertation Award 2011

The 2011 BERA Dissertation Award is made for the best PhD, DPhil or EdD thesis for research in Education awarded by a UK university in 2011.

The dissertation or thesis writer must be a member of BERA. The closing date for applications for this year is 1st April 2011.

To apply, a completed nomination, proposer’s statement and thesis abstract are required. Applicants must also name one external examiner whose views will be sought as part of the judging process.

Application forms and more information can be found on the Awards section of the BERA website (www.bera.ac.uk) under the ‘about’ menu link.

Note: The term ‘dissertation’ is taken to include ‘thesis’.
My overall impression was that, although not everything was perfect for everybody (is it ever?), it was a very good conference.

Thank you to the 249 delegates (a similar figure to 2009) who submitted online feedback. Your feedback provides an important element in our planning.

Conference committee took some criticism last year for the ‘Manchester rain’, so we’ll hopefully take some credit for the ‘Warwick sun’. The venue itself was well received with 57% rating the university accommodation as ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’ (21% in 2009) and 64% rating the conference catering as ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’ (35% in 2009).

As an academic conference, it is gratifying to see that the quality of papers remains high. 64% of responses rated the quality of papers as ‘Good’ or ‘Very good’. The comparable figure for 2009 was 53%. Congratulations to all those who presented papers.

One interesting suggestion is that more fruitful discussion and feedback could be generated if papers were provided in advance, with those attending not expecting a rushed presentation of the whole study/project, but rather getting a brief overview from the presenter in the knowledge that the audience have read the paper. The presenter(s) could then pose questions for discussion, invite feedback for further development of the research paper, or raise issues that could trigger debate and questions from the floor. The bulk of the time could then be devoted to discussion and debate. Conference committee can facilitate this approach, provided that authors are prepared to submit full papers before the conference. Perhaps a group of authors could do this for a symposium at BERA 2011 or one or more SIGs might consider this initiative?

Comments were also made about the availability of papers:
• Most people come to present their paper, but don’t actually have copies available….
• Copies of Powerpoint slides are not papers
• Insist that everyone brings at least 30 hard copies of their paper including the full reference list or switch to online papers posted a week before conference.

Another theme from the feedback related to the programme content, along the lines of:
• there were not enough papers on [insert your own area of interest here]
• conference shouldn’t be so heavily-based on [insert your own preference or prejudice !! here]

I think that being a general conference is one of BERA’s strengths and I always try and attend one session at conference that is outside my ‘comfort zone’. Sometimes I’ve found myself out of my depth, but often I’ve learnt much that was new to me. An individual delegate’s particular requirements will depend upon their own areas of interest. If there aren’t enough papers in your area, why not write one and encourage your colleagues to submit some? We can try and ensure that the conference organisation is as good as it can be, but the content is largely down to delegates.

Looking forward to seeing you in London at BERA 2011 – over to you!
There are some important changes to our Conference;
• it is now 3 days (including the Early Career Researcher conference - ECR);
• it runs from Tuesday to Thursday;
• delegates will be provided with a list of local accommodation and they will be able to make their own arrangements.

BERA 2011 will be held at the Institute of Education, London. It will open with the ECR from 09.00 on Tuesday 6th September and end at 16.30 on Thursday 8th September 2011.

For our 37th Annual Conference we will be returning to the IoE (www.ioe.ac.uk), where we held a successful conference in 2007. The Institute is located in the heart of Bloomsbury, London's academic district. Garden squares and historic buildings surround the campus. Founded in 1902 as a teacher training college in London, the IoE is now a world-class research and teaching institution. London:
• offers a wide choice of accommodation ranging from economy hotels to deluxe five-star properties and within 20 minutes walking from the IoE there are many hotels to suit every budget;
• is a major travel gateway and local, national and international transport links are both flexible and fully accessible. The venue is a short distance away from St. Pancras International, Euston and Kings Cross rail terminals. There are Tube stations and bus stops within walking distance that provide direct access to the rest of London (www.tfl.gov.uk);
• is also a vibrant city and offers a wide range of places to see and arts, theatre and music events (www.visitlondon.com/).

The keynote presentations at BERA 2011 will be given by: Baroness Onora O'Neill and Professor Mary James.

Baroness Onora O’Neill is a professor of philosophy at the University of Cambridge and a crossbench member of the House of Lords. She was Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge from 1992–2006. Her presentation will be titled ‘Intelligent Accountability in Education’. Systems of accountability are second order ways of assessing the standard to which first order tasks are carried out, for a great variety of purposes. However, more accountability is not always better, and processes of holding to account can impose high costs without securing substantial benefits. This can happen in education, for example if the assessment tail starts to wag the education dog, or if beautiful lesson plans produce little learning. Teachers and learners, like others, need to be held to account by intelligent systems of accountability that do not distort the primary activity, while providing enough – but not excessive – evidence of standards achieved to specific audiences for specific purposes. Intelligent accountability in education, as elsewhere, needs to communicate, not merely to disseminate, relevant evidence that can be assessed by those to whom professionals and institutions are accountable in real time.

Professor Mary James was Deputy Director of the UK-wide ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme from 2002 to 2008. As incoming BERA President, she will give her Presidential address ‘How Can We Speak Truth to Power, and Be Heard? A case for principled pragmatism’. BERA has done a great deal to establish mechanisms and infrastructures for its collective wisdom to be coordinated, mined and further developed. A task in the coming years will be to increase its efforts to put this work to good use for the benefit of education. Central will be communication and dialogue with key stakeholders about the relevance of research evidence to policy. But how should we go about this? Drawing particularly on the experience of TLRP, this address will explore the diversity of direct and indirect ways in which research can have impact without compromising fundamental values.

I take pleasure in inviting you to submit a proposal for the 2011 Annual Conference. Please make a note of these important dates:
• January 10th is the deadline for submissions for the BERA Symposia Competition;
• January 24th is the deadline for submissions for the Main and Early Career Researcher Conference.

We look forward to meeting up with colleagues and friends in London 2011. Look out for further information on the BERA website (www.bera.ac.uk) and the Conference website (www.beraconference.co.uk).
Notes for contributors

Disclaimer
In the interests of professional and academic dialogue, RI will occasionally publish articles that deal with controversial topics. Publication of any article by RI should not be seen as an endorsement by BERA of the views expressed, but as an attempt to promote academic freedom.

Articles
Each issue of RI aims to capture a range of perspectives on a topic of current relevance to the diverse sites for the generation and mobilisation of education research. We would like to receive articles relevant to the themes announced in the calls for contributions to each issue of RI. If you have some recently completed research that you feel is relevant to the theme and likely to be of interest to BERA members, please summarise it in approximately 1500 words and send it to the Editor.

Opinion
Brief opinion pieces of relevance to the theme of each issue OR addressing other current critical issues affecting education research and its stakeholders are also welcome. Material should not exceed 800 words.

Members wishing to respond to an existing piece or to suggest topics for future issues of RI should contact the Editor.

Mobilising research
We would like to receive brief pieces relevant to agencies or individuals who use educational research. We would particularly welcome contributions sharing teacher education news in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Material should not exceed 800 words and should be sent to the Editor.

We also encourage members to submit contributions discussing initiatives of strategic importance to education research from any sector of activity.

From the SIGs
SIG convenors can use the medium of RI to update all BERA members of their activities or open up a particular issue for debate. Contributions should not exceed 800 words and be sent to the Editor.

Editor
The Editor encourages electronic submission of articles etc. Please send your contributions to Alis Oancea: alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk

RI Archive project

A project is underway to produce an archive of Research Intelligence by scanning back copies of RI and saving them as PDFs.

The aim is to have a complete archive of all editions of RI from the 1970s to the present day. Files have been uploaded to the website and further editions will be added as they are processed. The files can be found on the BERA website (http://www.bera.ac.uk/publications/ri/).

Call for contributions to RI 114

The next issue of RI (winter/spring 2011) will focus on the funding and assessment of education research after April 2011. If you would like to contribute please contact alis.oancea@education.ox.ac.uk with the subject line “RI 114”. We are keen to hear from different education sectors and interest groups, and from different sites for the generation and use of education research. The deadline for papers will be December 20, 2010.
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<td>6 - 8 September 2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECER 2011</td>
<td>13 -16 September 2011 (pre-conference 12 -13 September)</td>
<td>Freie Universität Berlin, Germany</td>
<td>17 January 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AARE International Education Research Conference 2011</td>
<td>27 November -1 December 2011</td>
<td>Hobart, Australia</td>
<td>not available yet</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note: please check associations’ websites for changes in submission deadlines.