The mediatisation of the literacy practices of academic knowledge production

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Academics Writing
Dynamics of Knowledge Creation

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Existing work on academic writing

1. Much work in the field of academic writing focuses on students' learning.

2. Other work analyzes linguistic aspects of academic articles.

Academic writing as workplace practice

3. We approach academic writing as a workplace practice – what do professional academics *do* in academic writing work?

4. We are interested in contemporary change with technological resources being an important aspect.

5. We are interested in all types of writing, not just scholarly.

There has been a small amount of research on this.

2009 Pilot study

- Interviews with 9 academics in social sciences and humanities, Barton and Hamilton, working with Amy Burgess (Satchwell, Barton and Hamilton 2013)

- Interviews took place 2009 – pre-impact agenda in England, and impact given lower priority institutionally:

We found:

- Very wide range of types of writing.

- People mentioned the role of technologies extensively

Broad influences on the HE workplace in England

- Transformations in <u>relationships with students</u>
  - Massification
  - Consumerisation
  - Internationalisation
- Transformations in <u>managerial practices</u>
  - Funding mechanisms
  - League tables
  - Research assessment framework
  - impact

Transformations in tools and resources

e.g.

- Virtual learning environments
- Online library resources
- Social media
- File sharing and other tools for collaborative work
- Smartphones and portable devices

Etc.

How are digital communications technologies shaping academics' writing practices?

- Adopting a social practice approach to language and literacy, including techno-biographic interviews
- To understand academics' writing practices across universities and disciplines – History, Marketing and Maths.
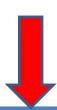
The role of digital tools and resources

In relation to :

- Uses of time and space
- Patterns of collaboration
- Managerial demands

Martin Weller 'The Digital Scholar'

Every aspect of academic practice is changed by media.

We are here

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| Phase 1: working with individuals | Phase 2: detailed study of writing processes | Phase 3: understanding the community |

Phase 1: working with individuals

- Interviews with individuals about their work practices, **technobiographies,** and typical days' practices.
- Auto-ethnography

Phase 2: detailed study of writing processes

- Recording the detail of writing processes using screen capture, digital pens, keyboard tracking, informed by interviews

Phase 3: understanding the community

- Interviews with managers, administrative staff, colleagues and collaborators

Changes in the academic landscape: Working and writing spaces

- Most people have experienced some sort of change in their work space – smaller rooms, shared space, new departments.

- Most people say their office is not where they do 'serious' writing work.

- People talk of places 'to escape to'.

- Rebecca A: "… I have almost never written in my office." Not conducive to work, because people call in. All writing, including emails, admin, lecture-writing, done at home.
- Gareth W works a day a week at home – too many interruptions in the office. Needs an hour to read what he's been writing in previous session – so needs longer uninterrupted time.

Wide range of digital tools and platforms used in writing

- Diane S: Writes in Word; uses Skype often and screenshares documents; uses shared Dropbox for version control.

- Gareth W: writes using Word and LaTeX, sending documents back and forth using LaTeX which his student compiles, uses email, but not VLE much

- Rebecca A: digital camera revolutionised collection of archive material; but still likes to hand write manuscripts

- Don R: limited use of digital tools (Word mainly) in research; innovative collaborative teaching using VLE, driven by requests from Faculty

Likes and hates

- Charles C: "I hate Skype. […] I find it's a simplistic thing, the dislocation between eye contact.."
- Prefers meeting face to face, spending the day with people, having coffee breaks and dividing work tasks

Individual profiles

- Charles C. also uses Dropbox to synchronise documents between his computers,
  - "for each pile there that represents a project that we're working on, but like anything most of it's actually in Dropbox."
- uses a transcription service sending documents back and forth electronically,
- and uses NVivo to code data – describing this as 'a real hands-on analysis'.

Collaboration facilitated by digital tools

- Diane S: Large international collaborative research bids, 13 universities in 6 countries, writing crucial.

  Bid depended on combination of distant collaboration facilitated by both digital tools, and face to face meetings.

- Happened very quickly – between 1st May and 11th June

- "It started off with the proposal coming to me. There were a couple of Skype discussions. The forms that needed to be filled in were sent out. I then went to Gothenburg for two or three days. […] So then we wrote pieces, and then that's been circulated around."

The 'always-on' problem

- Implicit expectation of being constantly in contact using digital devices
  - Extension of responsibilities to students
  - Including blended learning for on-campus students

'Always-on' 2

– Gareth W: feels he emails too much, answering emails all through the evening

– Rebecca A: "We're expected to be on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

– Diane S: "It's like every time you sit down to do some writing, an email comes in that takes you away from it."

– Charles C: "…the last thing I do at night is check my emails. The first thing I do in the morning is check my emails."

Current tensions around the mediatization of academia.

- Need to be discussed in the context of other social changes.

- Changing stakeholders and what they value.

- Creativity and freedom v. pressure and control.

Next Steps:

Phase 1: working with individuals

Phase 2: detailed study of writing processes

Phase 3: understanding the community

- Interviews with individuals about their work practices, **technobiographies,** and typical days' practices.
- Auto-ethnography

- Recording the detail of writing processes using screen capture, digital pens, keyboard tracking, informed by interviews

- Interviews with managers, administrative staff, colleagues and collaborators

For info:

http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/acadswriting/

THE END